

Beneath Damocle's Sword Opened The Dragon's Mouth

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Beneath Damocle's Sword Opened The Dragon's Mouth

by [Marbel](#)

Summary

Aizawa said their class was going on a field trip to Yokohama--the city of sins with no heroes.

Some of the kids yelled from shock, others worried about villains, and plenty more were doing their best to prepare for any possible threats. Not Katsuki though. Katsuki sat in his desk with a broken pen in his hand.

Katsuki was not generally a nervous mess or easily scared but he only had one thought about the whole situation: He was So. Very. Royally. Fucked.

Notes

This is a what if of my other fic, Coiled Dragon. I'll try to make it so that you don't need to know the other fic to understand this one.

Katsuki didn't get kick out of UA and he is on the trip to Yokohama with the rest of the class :) Basically another class trip to Yokohama story with a different spin. LOL.

It is a crossover between three series and it will contain spoilers for Battle of The Six Realms and Bungo Stray Dogs. If you are interested, please check out 六道闘争紀 (Battle of The Six Realms) by 小田世里奈 (Serina Oda)! The art style is amazing!

Chapter 1

1

They were going on a field trip to Yokohama.

All the internal screaming couldn't stop Katsuki from punching his pillow out of nervousness and anxiety. When Aizawa announced the news at school, he thought he was still dreaming and had to suppress the urge to slap himself in the middle of class.

"Evil comes in all shapes and forms, so does justice. Please use this opportunity to see for yourselves how the world is a big place. We would be frogs in the well if we remain stuck in a certain perspective for too long."

Fuck that rat of a principal.

Katsuki absolutely hated rats, both the human and animal kind.

A part of him understood Principal Nedzu while the majority of him wanted to dangle the principal off the top of the Tokyo Tower. How could anybody in their right mind want to send a bunch of teenagers into Yokohama? A bunch of *hero-in-training* teenagers to top the absurdity off too!

There were other ways to understand evil or tackle the subject of how many shades of gray society can dye itself in. Whatever happened to good old fashioned community outreach or street sweeps? Those were *local* and at least the worst were possibly getting hackle by the mentally disturbed or finding needles behind garbage cans. Maybe a drug dealer or small-time villain here and there. Katsuki doubted that their teachers would allow them to approach sensitive topics like prostitution or gang violence too. A problem that could easily be avoided by coordinating with local police who knew the area and trusted the heroes. It wouldn't be a piece of cake but it was the safer option.

They didn't understand Yokohama.

None of the outsiders did. They knew of Yokohama of course. It was a port city, where commerce and transportation thrived. Somewhere that was filled with beautiful beaches and plenty of foreigners coming and going everyday. People might even know it as the city with the most quirkless population in all of Japan. They'd talk about how it was stuck in the past, where no woman with tentacle hair walked about and no flashy billboards with heroes in tights selling a drink. It was an old place, where people were plain, clothing boring, and the buildings smaller, inaccessible and unaccommodating to most with physical mutations.

In middle school, the teachers taught about the basic history of indignity Yokohama went through. Even before the dawn of quirks, war had torn through its land, then the city was rented or paid out to foreign countries as part of peace treaties. It exchanged hands many times before Yokohama was again part of Japan officially. That was when criminal organizations took over the ruins. While people in power were busy dealing with the rise of

quirks, criminals and gangs fought over control of Yokohama the old fashion way. It had been a lawless period. By the time Japan's government and established pro heroes wanted to handle the mess, the problem was no longer one that they could even begin to clean up.

The rumors were spreaded next, on the internet and through word of mouth. Anonymous users typed about organized crime in Yokohama. From news of impossible thefts to darker goods that only those with deep enough pockets could obtain, they wrote about how deep fear gripped this city. Others spoke of rogue villains, of criminals left with nowhere to go or other unsavory individuals hiding out there. Trafficking, drugs, prostitution, unlicensed doctors, fake documents...everything nasty and bad could be found in Yokohama.

For the right price and only to the right person of course.

It was a city of sins, where every carnal pleasure and criminal fantasy could come alive for the brave and the vile (and the stupid). In a sense, it was attractive to outside villains. Those whose quirks weren't powerful enough to escape the wrath of the heroes sought to make a name for themselves in Yokohama. They flocked to the city, hoping to be free from the law.

Except that none of them ever made it back out.

Soon, in the darker corners of society, the cockroaches learned that people vanished from Yokohama all the time. Some would be found dismembered, others drowned in booze...and even more were never found.

But that barely scratched the surface of what Yokohama actually was.

Katsuki turned his wrist, feeling his bones cracking against each other while his stiff muscles attempted to relax. Two weeks. That was how long they had to be in Yokohama. Because of UA's special standing and in order to prevent them from causing trouble, information that most civilians didn't have on Yokohama were shared with the attending students and pro heroes. This city wasn't completely quirkless. It also had a small population of special people—the Ability Users.

Abilities were different from quirks. While quirks were often limited to the owner's physical body, an ability wasn't always restrained that way. It could be magnitudes more powerful or unrelated to appearance but at the same time, it often wasn't inheritable or combinable like quirk mutations.

These people split Yokohama under their control. Worst of all, right now the most powerful organization in the city was a mafia group called Port Mafia.

Only two pro heroes watching over forty-one kids (because Shinshou was joining the hero class in the next school year) in enemy territory. What could go wrong? No, actually. It made perfect sense, so much so that Katsuki wanted to bang his head against his bedroom wall. Sending too many heroes would upset the powers in Yokohama. Two adults—the teachers of each class—was the most Port Mafia's boss could accept. Too many pros and it would be very suspicious, seeming like the outside government or Hero Commission wanted to invade Yokohama.

Yeah, they probably *want* to. They just can't make it so obvious.

And who better to send then students? Kids who didn't know anything, who were excited to learn and have fun, and not fully grown to pose an immediately domineering threat like All Might. From Port Mafia's standpoint, it would also give them a better chance to assess the future heroes. Katsuki would bet that some in Yokohama were thinking that it might even be possible to convert a few good pawns over to their side if the opportunity was right.

Fuck all the adults.

This was a three way trade off, each with their own agendas to fulfill. UA and HPSC came up with a compromise while negotiating with Port Mafia. UA wanted a teaching opportunity, something to give their students an extra edge because the best gems could only be obtained after a polish. HPSC wanted information on the city that refused any pro hero involvement. Port Mafia got paid for a chance to check out the possible best of the next generation heroes.

What a horrible bunch.

He picked up the consent form from school that was sitting on his desk. It needed his parents' signature. UA had already contacted them through phone and they knew the risks of Yokohama. Quite frankly, Katsuki didn't think his parents would refuse. It was a school field trip and one that nobody else in class was backing out from.

His parents wouldn't let him fall behind.

Katsuki found his mom in the kitchen. It was one of those rare days where his parents were home. They were usually busy. If he wanted, he could count the total hours the two of them spent at home in a week on one hand. It was fine though. Better that way even.

At least he wouldn't be in screaming matches with his mom or have to hear his old man talk about manners.

And he had things that he couldn't take care of with others around.

"The school needs you to sign this" he said while handing over the paperwork. "It's for Yokohama."

She didn't sign it immediately. His mom looked at the consent form then her eyes landed on him. They had the same eyes and were so similar that it was scary. They clashed often, whether it was about looks or because of the way he conducted himself. Too rough around the edges, too thin or too fat, too little makeup to shouldn't need any, too much baggy black clothing...the list of grievances went on and always seemed to change on the spot. It was partly out of professional habit, he supposed. A drive for perfection that he shared.

His parents loved him.

His parents wanted a perfect hero. Shining smiles and dashing chivalry, the kind of sunshine that could blanket everybody in its radiance. Someone who could light up the room with kindness and warmth, bringing a torch of hope wherever he went.

The problem was that it wasn't Katsuki. He couldn't be like that. He was the furthest thing from that.

"I don't want to get a call from your teachers," his mom said after the silence, "Do you know how much PR overtime I had to pull after that stunt you pulled at the sports festival?"

"Yes." He could never hear the end of it. *A violent individual*, the news and social media claimed. They were scared of his quirk, deterred by how explosive his personality was. Too brash and too much of a villain, as many would claim. People talked of how cruel he was in a fight when all he did was respect his opponent. It was a bad reputation for his parents' clothing brand. They didn't want their outfits to be associated with street punks or possibly villainous tendencies.

To some degree, his parents cared for him. Whether that was out of legal responsibilities or because of the connection they shared through blood, they cared if he was safe or if he stepped out of line. But he wasn't their only son. His parents had another child more important than him, one that had no human flesh but had been with them for over two decades: Their company.

Their treasure. They have built it from scratch together, pouring hours of blood and sweat and countless resources into making it thrive. This one was their true pride and joy. It never complained under their command, letting them chisel and carve every aspect of it into the shape they desired.

It was much more obedient than Katsuki ever would be.

"You'll behave on the trip. Don't cause trouble and try to keep your big mouth shut for once. Yokohama...it's not a nice place. Don't you dare think you can get away with your usual snarks so easily."

There was a hint of worry in her voice. He tried to ignore the stab of her words. Keep his mouth shut. Hold his tongue. He heard the warnings all his life and it seemed to be all he was doing since he could remember.

Listen and don't speak. Make the smart decisions. Make the nice decisions.

His true thoughts didn't matter and couldn't be voiced.

Bad things would happen when he spoke his mind.

"Yeah, sure."

"Good. Don't give people any more reason to hate you."

Some already did; Those who thought they were just and right in wanting to defend a girl against his brutalities in a tournament. Those who whispered about how he must have done something to be targeted by the mud villain in middle school. And certainly a hell lot more people if they knew Katsuki's name.

Because everything was always somehow his fault. Flies weren't bred from unspoiled food. There might be a rot somewhere if the foul wanted a piece of him. There must be a reason for all the unfortunate things that happened to him because good people don't get punished by fate. If he just changed his attitude or his hair or smiled more, he would be happy and he would fit in.

He could be happy. He just wasn't trying hard enough.

If only things were that simple. If only he could say the words and his parents would understand him. They would love him unconditionally instead of counting how many trophies he brought home first. If only they could know him for who he really was instead of wanting to mold him into someone else.

But then it would still be a lie. They won't love him for him. They would just be under a spell where contempt was forcibly twisted into adoration. No matter how nice even imagining it would be, at the end of the day it was still fake.

She gave the signed paper back to him and he returned to his room, letting the door shut and lock tightly behind him.

Taking a deep breath, Katsuki clasped his hands over his mouth as if preventing his heart from leaping off his tongue. He breathed slowly, each inhale and exhale deliberately exaggerated to keep air circulating into his lungs.

Inhale.

His room smelled of scented candles, something sweetly floral. In his imagination, it was a different scent. Lotuses. Freshly bloomed over calm waters, the pink petals would cause small ripples across the water's surface. Less artificial and the scent would carry on the night breeze out the window.

Exhale.

There was a hint of the salty ocean. The noise of the city echoed beside his ears, from the clap of collective footsteps downstairs to train stations to the rolling noise of cars down a street. Afar, the lights from skyscrapers and neon signs blurred into one under the drizzle of rain. If he closed his eyes, he could see a hue of red against the reflection of a window. Fresh as blood, soft as silk, its color the same as the mysteries of Yokohama against a backdrop of ink that spilled like waterfall. The one secret not even those born of Yokohama's deepest darkness would know.

It was going to be okay. They would be fine.

Only two weeks. He could do this.

Nobody was going to die. At least, he hoped it wouldn't come down to that. He'd really hate it if one of his classmates or teachers became a part of the numerous red stains in Yokohama's records.

In Yokohama, there was an unmistakable landmark that was almost a symbolism of its violent history. At the center of the city stood five black towers that overlooked the rest of downtown, occupying some of the most expensive real estate in Yokohama. However, these weren't shopping centers or government buildings.

The towers belonged to Port Mafia.

Men in dark suits guarded every entrance with guns at their belts. The brazen criminals had the area secured as if it was a fort. Most citizens knew to avoid the area unless they also dabbled in the darker shades of society. Nobody wanted to be "invited" for a tour in the mafia's facility, not unless they want to somehow end up in the basement and never be able to walk out with their own two feet.

Dazai Osamu yawned as he entered the main tower. The lower ranking mafia members eyed him suspiciously, careful and discreet in their judgements but he still picked up on the hostility. He smiled at them but it only made more trigger happy.

Still the same nervous and boring bunch as always.

"Dazai," his current employer warned from in front of him. Fukuzawa Yukichi was a stern middle-aged man with a tall physique and long silver hair. Although he wore a pair of wooden zori, his steps were still quiet. Dressed in his usual green yukata and black haori, his katana was sheathed at his waist.

Although Japan had banned open carry of cold weapons such as swords in history, they had relaxed that rule after the rise of quirks. Some heroes and law enforcement were permitted to carry them for duty. That rule was laxly enforced in Yokohama though. From criminals to military personnel, even private security or normal civilians could have a few surprises hidden somewhere in their homes or on them at all times.

Of course, Fukuzawa would want to do things on the formal side of the law most of the time. Being the head and founder of the Armed Detective Agency (ADA), they weren't lawless or cruel like Port Mafia. They were licensed detectives who acted as external consultants for the police or privately commissioned by civilians for additional security or anything else private investigators could handle. Maybe sometimes unique situations called for wildly imaginative solutions but normally, they tried to adhere to the basic rules of civilized society.

Dazai placed his hands on the back of his head instead of into the pockets of his brown trench coat. Their jumpy audience would be more suspicious of hands out of their sight.

Down the hall and up the elevator. Take a turn here and another there. Dazai knew this maze but he said nothing as they were taken to a meeting room instead of Port Mafia's Boss's office. There was nothing to complain about too. It was a decent space, brightly lit with one way windows that allowed a great view of Yokohama's landscape but provided great privacy. It was a less formal setting than meeting in the Boss's office at the top of the tower, which Dazai hadn't decided if that was good or bad news yet.

There were already people in the room. The other three major powers of Yokohama were gathered, each occupying a side of the table. Each of the leaders were seated while an assistant or bodyguard stood behind them.

“I’m against hosting hero students from the outside,” Fukuzawa announced immediately as he stepped into the room. His stance was firm and Dazai couldn’t blame him. Yokohama had enough problems. They didn’t need a bunch of wide-eyed hero kids attracting attention or causing trouble in the streets.

“Good day to you too, Fukuzawa.” The man seated at the head of the rectangular table smiled at them. Mori Ogai—Port Mafia’s boss—leaned his head on his hand, watching his guests take the remaining two seats at the opposite end of the table. Mori was an average man with middle-length dark hair and thin eyes. As usual, he sported a black suit and a maroon scarf draped down his shoulders. Despite his warm smile, the ex-doctor always had a calculating air to him and he wouldn’t be seated in this chair today if he wasn’t sly as a fox. “Getting directly to the point as usual. I didn’t even have the chance to offer you tea yet.”

The table was empty. No tea or snacks to be offered anywhere in sight.

“There is not much to discuss. While I can understand why this request came to us, I don’t believe it’s in my agency’s best interest to be taking care of outsiders.” Fukuzawa crossed his arms in front of his chest, staring at Mori with a frown.

“I don’t appreciate the Port Mafia reaching a deal with UA privately either,” said the Director Taneda Santoka from the Special Division of Unusual Powers. The bald man wasn’t that much older than Fukuzawa. He wore traditional clothing too and had a pair of circular glasses that made him resemble poets of the past. Stroking his goatee, he continued, “What did they promise you in exchange?”

Director Taneda must be here to represent Yokohama’s government. While quirks weren’t as common as they were on the outside in this city, there were still branches of officials making sure everybody (quirk and ability users included) kept a certain level of peace. Dazai also saw an old friend behind Director Taneda. The man in a light violet suit nodded curtly at him but remained silent in the background. Ango Sakaguchi stood at attention with his back erected and his heart on guard, ready to protect his supervisor at any time.

Dazai didn’t care much about formalities. There was no point in acting either. They were all old acquaintances here and if there was anything Dazai was known for, it certainly wouldn’t be for a proper code of conduct. He placed his forearm on the back of Fukuzawa’s chair as he leaned forward.

“Nobody will say no to easy money,” answered Mori. He raised his hand and the man—Nakahara Chuuya (or a *slug* as Dazai preferred to call him)—passed out folders. Chuuya made a small noise of disgust as he passed by Dazai. The orange haired mafia pressed his fedora hat lower as he retreated to behind Mori. He was one of the few mafia higher ups that wore less boring outfits. While he shared the same professional style of three piece suits with most of high society, he had a black choker instead of a tie. His jacket was also draped over his shoulders instead of worn properly.

This slug hadn't managed to grow another inch or two taller since the last time Dazai saw him. Short as always, Chuuya was probably past the age of hitting another growth spurt too.

And Dazai found everything that annoyed Chuuya delightful news.

“These are the students’ information that UA has generously shared with us. You can confirm if we modified or omitted anything if you like.” Mori was planning something. Dazai could easily guess that this wasn’t the extent of Port Mafia’s deal with UA. Anybody with enough time and a computer can locate information on future hero students. UA debuted their kids every year during the sports festival, letting the teenagers show off their quirks and personalities on live broadcast. This year, because of a villain attack on campus and All Might’s teaching career, UA was under additional spotlight too.

There was no use lying or hiding this information. Mori wouldn’t have traded anything valuable for such easily accessible information either.

“I’m not against the idea of granting outsiders safe passage into Yokohama. What I am concerned about is that they are hero kids and you’re asking for a special permit to allow their stay. They’re not the same as people who are looking to settle in Yokohama or villains that I can arrest.” Director Taneda placed a hand on the folder in front of him. “I can stop the Hero Public Safety Commission from trying to weasel into our affairs through levels of government or delay them with paperwork...but I can’t refuse them if something happens to the kids in Yokohama. They’ve tried that before.”

It was an easy plot too. They sent a new hero to Yokohama. Smiling, hopeful, and ready to make changes that could be their own breakthrough. The young hero sneaked into the city but got kicked out by agents before they accidentally pissed off the wrong gang. The difference was that the heroes were adults and now they were potentially having to deal with children.

Any time a minor died and not due to natural causes, it meant extra trouble.

“I understand that but I feel it’s urgent for Yokohama to change,” Mori said. His voice was light as if describing the state of rain. “You see, Yokohama has isolated itself many times in the past. My predecessor was also rather hostile to the heroes. Some scholars even tried to reason that we are following a different evolutionary path. The people outside, no matter how dumb or weak, they still have powers that our normal civilians don’t. Untrained, it’d be hard for a normal man to kill another who can breathe fire, don’t you think? We might not need more unrest but we do need an important resource; People.”

There weren’t as many ability users as quirks users.

That still didn’t explain Mori’s urgency though.

“More importantly, All Might is dying.”

That got everybody’s attention.

Mori’s smile lessened into a more serious line. “He’s had a long career and now he’s aging. Crime on the outside had dropped when the Symbol of Peace was established but no one can

live forever. All Might is not in his prime any more and when he's gone, who can take up his mantle? Endeavor? No. The rest of the heroes in the ranks can't come close. Even if they tried, there will still be a period of festivals for the so-called villains. People who think they could have it all now that the No.1 hero is gone, people whose ambition and desires had been suppressed for so long...imagine how big of a game they'd want to score. We all have businesses or associations outside of Yokohama. It'd be detrimental to our operations if the rest of Japan sinks into chaos."

His fingers tapped along the edge of the folder, flipping it open. "Also, society would need a new Symbol of Peace. They have a surplus of heroes out there that saving people is a commercial business and a popularity contest. How else to make their fame if a hero can take Yokohama? How many do you want to bet would try to achieve what All Might can't?"

With a push, pictures of young faces spilled out across the table.

"We need information. We need a plan to stop the heroes from getting funny ideas. That is why I agreed to UA's request when they approached me." Sighing, Mori picked at the pictures in front of him. He held up the closest picture of a kid with green hair and crumbled it in his fist. "They think they can scout information from us but we can do the same. These are supposedly the best of the next generation, aren't they? What they do will influence others. We don't need to kill them or announce a war with the outside heroes. We just need to...*show* them that the world isn't theirs to do as they pleased. Not everybody needs someone in a cape to come to their rescue."

As much as Dazai loathed more work, Mori made sense. Yokohama had complicated issues and the powers (be it criminal or legal ones) were intricately connected. There was history and feud that couldn't be untangled or secrets that couldn't be known to the world. Many ability users were hiding from normal society too because it might bring them harm. Prosecuted for power they couldn't control, labeled because of habits different from the norm, sought after to be used for a "greater good".

Of course they had their own issues but to many, Yokohama was a safe haven and their hell simultaneously.

And that was just how they chose to live.

Director Taneda flipped through his folder. "Children...they are easier to deal with and the pro heroes that would be with them would be held back because of the students' presence."

No teacher would actively want kids in their care to get hurt.

"Exactly."

"How can you be sure the kids won't cause too much trouble?" The man pulled out a picture of a boy with purple balls as hair. "This one has a note about high sexual drive...how did this kid even make it into heroics? He would have been tossed out at the application stage if he was applying to be a cop."

Shaking his head, he pulled another one. This one was a blond boy with red eyes and spikey blond hair. "This one was the one on TV. They said he is quite rash in acting out."

“UA has assured that their students will stick to a strict no-quirk usage rule. The kids won’t be much of an issue without their quirks. While a few have been training, most of them aren’t the greatest or most experienced in combat yet.”

A quick silence passed in the room before Director Taneda nodded. “I will agree to this proposal on the condition that ADA will watch the students primarily and accommodate them in public hotels. Port Mafia may send men to observe but it has to be from afar. We don’t need the heroes to be digging into your business this early on.” Handing the folder to Ango, Director Taneda added, “Of course, the commission to ADA is paid by Port Mafia. In exchange, we will handle the background work associated with permitting only UA’s authorized personnel to enter Yokohama.”

HPSC or any other hero agencies couldn’t send in reinforcements or spies then.

“That can be arranged,” Mori agreed. “Fukuzawa, is that alright?”

Fukuzawa placed a hand on his temple, rubbing away a migraine. “I have to agree, don’t I? But we can’t have All Might in Yokohama. I don’t care if he’s No.1 or a teacher or whatever else. He stays out of Yokohama no matter what.”

Agreement was shared across the table before Fukuzawa turned to the corner of the room. That side of the table had been quiet but that was a given. Dazai and everyone else was used to it. Besides the government, the mafia, and an agency of superpowered detectives, another strong player shaped Yokohama too.

This one operated under the guise of a medical and prosthetics company. Its founder was young, barely of age but he was a child prodigy that made his name known in the city of sins. Years ago, the worst part of Yokohama was a neighborhood called Suribachi City. It suffered some kind of explosion that leveled the area, causing many to become homeless. The worst of the worst and the poorest of the poor gathered in tent cities built over the ruins. Gangs and hunger took Suribachi City until Huang Zeku arrived.

A boy of foreign roots decided to build a company from scratch and he succeeded. He poured the money he made into rebuilding Suribachi City but while his acts could be considered charitable, the boy certainly was a foul being. People called him The Dragon of Suribachi City because he was cold and hard, devouring his opponents whether in business or in a physical battle whole without mercy.

Kind hearts and love couldn’t save Suribachi but a dragon’s claws and teeth certainly could force it to change.

It just so happened that Huang Zeku was about as crazy as they came too. No one in their right mind would want to start a company in Suribachi. No one with a lick of brain would try to fight multiple gangs for control alone. Out of place and a mismatched piece in modern time, the orphan dressed in old fashions was stubborn as a bull who fought his way from the bottom up.

Dazai didn't hate people like him. Boring? Yes. Sometimes Huang Zeku was a different kind of boring than the mass. He had power but he was too smart to kill over what he could. He

looked like he should recite a bunch of outdated rules passed down from centuries ago but he never played by the book. Or he played by the rules too much that Dazai absolutely couldn't stand the routines.

No. He won't go into the details of how he once spent a whole week (under orders of course) tailing Huang Zeku only to confirm this kid lived like an old man with his tea and newspaper. Even old grannies doing tai chi had a spicier life than he did in all aspects other than fighting superpowered opponents.

And he didn't care for many things, which made planning against him trickier.

He was a peculiar individual. The young man preferred quiet and he rarely came out of Suribachi, like a dragon that'd rather hole up in its cave and count its trove. Huang Zeku was one to surround himself with design plans and creepy half-finished prosthetics than engage in small talk. Even now, he sat bored in his chair with an ankle crossed over his knee. When he yawned, the edge of sharp fangs could be seen and occasionally, there was a flash of colder glint behind his crimson eyes. His red tang suit was embroidered with lotus from gold threads while tassels of the same colors dangled from his ears that hosted other piercings too. A loop of jade and black thick threads was tied around his waist, holding everything in place along with the sash underneath. His hair was long like a river of scarlet that spilled down his chest. Its color was bright as blood upon his exposed collarbone because kids these days just can't seem to dress properly (the old man's words, not Dazai's).

Huang Zeku looked up, sharp eyes half-opened as if he was falling asleep. A pale finger pointed to the folder on the table and his secretary took it. She was a beautiful woman, with lush hair and a curvy body full of poison. Her dark blue suit dress shared oriental designs as most of Huang Corp's uniform did. The crossed collar and the knot buttons. The fabric that made her dress didn't have the same shimmer of gold pattern as her boss's.

With her by his side, Huang Zeku looked more like a rich heir to some old Chinese estate than someone who occupied a territory in a city that most heroes wouldn't even dare to set foot in.

"As long as the students walk out of Yokohama alive, then they can't complain." Huang Zeku leaned forward. His thumb and index finger rubbed against a bracelet of prayer beads. No one in this room was religious but Huang Zeku had a love for show. Violence and fineries, the Dragon adored his share of treasures and blood.

Breathing? Sure. A walking bag of flesh with a shattered mind was alive and breathing. A scared and functionless human was also alive. Driven mad, traumatized beyond their limits, spiraling down darker paths...all of those kinds of people were *alive*.

Fukuzawa and Director Taneda coughed, a small reminder to not go overboard.

"I'd hope it wouldn't come down to that but teenagers from the outside these days are certainly...less durable." Mori chuckled slightly. "They're young. Who can promise none of them would have a change of heart or find a new passion for a different life?"

Huang Zeku glanced at Mori, expression still blank as he stood up.

“If they should come to Suribachi or not, I don’t care. Decide that between you three and let my assistant know.” He pivoted towards the door. The red tail of his hair swayed behind him. “The rules of Suribachi City stays the same: Don’t cause trouble and don’t touch what’s mine.”

Or the future heroes would turn to dragon feed. As much as Dazai looked forward to death, being killed by Huang Zeku was not a method he'd recommend.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Midoriya couldn't believe they were going to Yokohama.

The school arranged a bus to take them into Yokohama like a normal field trip. It was a logical choice since Yokohama wasn't that far. From Musutafu, if they went by train it would be just a little over an hour and it was close to two by car. Midoriya was glad that unlike the internships, they didn't have to take the bullet trains. He couldn't imagine how much attention a hero class from UA would draw if they all got on a train headed for Yokohama.

It was kind of funny, actually. Now that he thought about it, Yokohama wasn't some far off mythical land that only showed up in folklore. But the city was one often talked about in rumors, where facts were distorted with no possibility of verifying them for normal people. Since there was also no hero activity happening there, Midoriya had never paid it much attention.

There was a time that his mom considered moving to Yokohama though. Originally it was because she heard about the huge quirkless population and thought it might help Midoriya. At the time, as more kids manifested their quirks, Midoriya was feeling increasingly left out. He couldn't levitate objects or grow a second limb. His skin was plain with freckles instead of being a cascade of colors. Amongst his peers, Midoriya stood out and not in a good way. The kids teased him and the adults...while not *all* of them, some appeared to have prejudices or biases against the quirkless. Conversations would take a turn for awkward at best or nasty when new people found out he was quirkless too. Everybody had labels that they wanted to slap on him for something out of his control.

Of course, not all of them were horrible but sometimes, pity was worse than cruelty. If people were explicitly mean, at least he had the right to be mad. However, when nice words were used, he had to swallow any upsetting feelings down to meet them with a smile.

It was bad for his mom too. Their neighbors gossiped. Especially with his dad not around often, her son being quirkless and a skinny little nerd with no extraordinary traits...well, rumors had to start somewhere, right?

The pressure and isolation were getting stifling for the both of them. His mom thought it might be better for him to be with people like him. Maybe it would be easier for them both to talk to others who shared the same experience. But after a bit of research online, calculating relocation costs, the issues of changing schools, and hearing horror stories from real estate agents, his mom gave up any ideas of moving to Yokohama. The idea of possibly living under a villain's rule with no heroes to save them was too horrifying to grasp.

They could grind through some gossip or biases but they certainly couldn't evade bullets. Not back then at least. Even now when he has One For All, Midoriya would never want his mom to be in a dangerous environment filled with villains.

She had been worried sick ever since she learned that his class was going to Yokohama. However, she still signed the consent forms after he explained how this trip was important.

It was a rare and invaluable opportunity. While there weren't official restrictions forbidding citizens from entering Yokohama, there was an unspoken rule where most people don't venture there unless absolutely necessary. The city was surrounded by mountains on three sides and bordered the ocean. The only official way in was to drive through a tunnel that had military personnel standing post. The military base was close by too so if anybody tried anything funny at the boundaries, immediate action would be taken.

A few brave souls tried before. Thrill chasers or social media influencers looking to boost views filmed their *attempted* trips to Yokohama. Maybe the military had people with special detection quirks stationed at the checkpoint but plenty of outsiders were barred from entering without an explanation or had their electronics confiscated. It sparked a few protests because people had rights but those landed on deaf ears.

Yokohama answered to a different set of laws.

The field trip to Yokohama would allow Midoriya and his peers to gain insights into this unique corner of Japan. They would get a chance to observe how police work could be done without the use of quirks or heroes, to understand how this city came to operate this way, and potentially gain critical information on the organized criminal activity happening in the city of crimes. Yokohama's police force was very uncooperative when it came to sharing information with heroes. While the standard reports all other police precincts needed to complete were sent out by Yokohama every year, cold numbers couldn't describe clear pictures.

What exactly made Port Mafia such a dominating force? How were they different from the other organized criminal organizations that All Might took down? What other kinds of villains were in Yokohama? What kind of lives did the citizens have?

There was just too much unknown.

Midoriya was still feeling anxious when he arrived at school early in the morning. His classmates and the majority of the Class B kids have already arrived. Suitcases and backpacks, everybody stood in front of the buses while their teachers stood to the side. The air was a little tense and quiet, both because it was very early and because they were nervous just like Midoriya was. He could feel it in the way they whispered to each other or see it in how tightly some kids grabbed onto their backpack straps.

"Move it!" a voice barked from behind him and he immediately flinched, ducking out of the way while apologizing out of reflex.

He expected Kacchan to be ready to explode as usual but when Midoriya saw the blond, something was odd. It wasn't the other teen's uniform or the black backpack or the suitcase with skull stickers. Bakugou Katsuki was how he usually was: Spikey hair and sharp red eyes with a scowl etched into his face. Midoriya knew Kacchan as an early bird and he always slept early but today, there was a slight hue of darker circles under the blond's eyes. Maybe

he lost sleep like the rest of them too. It was *the* Yokohama after all. Everybody grew up hearing at least one horror story about that city.

But Katsuki was also moving strangely. The difference was miniscule but Midoriya couldn't quite word it properly. He just knew there was *something* off. After all, he was observant and he grew up with Kacchan. Even if they weren't on the best terms, he still noticed stuff.

The closest description he could think of was that Katsuki was moving both faster and slower. Fast because he was already loading his stuff onto the bus before Iida even started directing the class. Slow because his movements weren't as wide as he normally carried himself boastfully. His strides were smaller and he didn't move about with the same level of scary energy like before. It wasn't that Katsuki was acting nicer since one glance at the knot between his eyebrows could still deter people away...but it was different; Quieter and more refined as if he was more aware of his own composure and surroundings.

And he didn't call Midoriya by any names.

Midoriya supposed he should be relieved. Maybe Aizawa-sensei talked to Kacchan in private already like the lecture he and Todoroki received. Their teacher wanted absolutely no trouble or straying students on this trip. It was different from when they were interning. At other places, the pro heroes could purposefully place the students in safer positions and acting out of line would more likely result in some media heat. In Yokohama? Death was probably the more fortunate option.

There were no heroes in Yokohama and none allowed in prior to UA's arrangement with Port Mafia. The only pro heroes would be their teachers, whose licenses held no legal authority in that city. No backup would come rushing to them for aid if they ever got caught in another Hero Killer situation again too.

"Midoriya, hurry up!"

His friend's voice called him into action. Midoriya picked up his pace to pack all his stuff onto the bus and slid into the spot next to Uraraka. Everybody else was already seated and there was a stranger at the head of the bus. He didn't look like the driver.

This man wore a light colored suit over a dark shirt. His hair was a dirty ash-blond and he wore glasses with thin rectangular frames. With a notebook in hand, he kind of resembled a young professor or middle-management type of director at a business firm.

"Good morning, class," he said with a smile but he still had a serious air about him. "I am Kunikida of the Armed Detective Agency. I'll be accompanying you to our office. Another colleague of mine is currently on the bus with Class B and he will relay the same information as I will be providing you all shortly. This is to keep everybody on the same page before we enter Yokohama. Please save any questions until I am done with the basics."

He explained that to better help them tour Yokohama, Principal Nedzu said The Armed Detective Agency (ADA) would send detectives to be the UA students' guides. The agency was made up of ability users who were Yokohama locals. They were like the heroes, who can use their powers to help the police keep peace since the agency has a special permit.

“Most of the basics are the same as the outside. I understand that some on the outside believe Yokohama is a completely lawless state because there are no heroes.” Mr. Kunikida flipped his notes but his eyes were focused on all of the students. A warning. “However, we do have a functioning police force and military personnels in addition to external aids like the ADA. Petty crime and physically harming others are not permitted. If you commit a crime, we will have to bring you to the police station. In Yokohama, you are considered of age at sixteen and depending on the severity of the crime, you will be charged as an adult no matter your age. It will leave a permanent mark in your records that is shared with the outside police.”

The bus was just leaving the city now. As the skyscrapers and busy roads started vanishing from outside the window, more greens began to climb under the clear blue sky.

“The most important thing is that under no circumstances can you use your quirk. Your presence is one authorized by Port Mafia. Thus, you will be safe in Yokohama as long as you don’t wander off alone or go against the rules I’m setting out for you all right now. If you step out of line, while we will do our best to ensure you survive, we can’t promise anything else.”

Midoriya heard a few other kids gulped at the seriousness of Kunikida’s tone. His own heart dropped a few vertebrae length lower too, clinging to the lower part of his spine with slight tremors.

Mr. Kunikida continued to flip to the next page of his notes. It didn’t look like he needed the notes but occasionally, he’d write something in it. “Currently, Yokohama is split under four major parties. The first, Port Mafia, as I’m sure you all know held the majority of the power. No matter what you’ve heard before, you are correct to assume they are not the best examples of human compassion or mercy but they have a code of conduct they will honor. You shall not approach them or attempt to snoop around looking for ‘villainous’ evidence. That is not your job and not your place. You are in Yokohama as guests and tourists.”

Midoriya saw Todoroki, who was in the seat across from him, opened his mouth but no word came at the last minute. He probably had the same question as everybody else but held it back in.

“The second is the police and the Special Division of Unique Powers. They are the government body handling the daily peace-keeping as well as overseeing the ability users’ activities. The third is us, the ADA. We assist both government and private citizens in solving cases or de-escalating issues that normal police would have their hands tied. The fourth is the Dragon. All you need to know for now is that you don’t touch what belongs to the dragon and you will be fine. There are other smaller organizations and lonewolf-type ability users, which shouldn’t be a problem as long as you follow our guidance in Yokohama.”

The man continued on, listing both basic knowledge that most kids learned for any field trips. Things like staying together, sticking to curfews, raise any issues with the teachers or ADA staff immediately. Most of them were normal stuff. The other parts circled around not engaging in any “heroic” activities, which was a repeat of what Aizawa-sensei said before.

They were tourists. They weren’t there to save Yokohama like the protagonists of some epic.

“Any questions?”

As soon as Mr. Kunikida asked, a bunch of hands shot up into the air. Midoriya raised his hand too. The only ones who didn't were Koda and Katsuki.

"What's the difference between your permit and a hero license?" Mina asked.

"The hero license is what an individual earns after passing your studies and exams. This permit is issued to the agency or organization as a whole. Any ability or quirk users under this organization can use their powers as needed. It is issued with the condition that everybody is using their powers within bounds of course. It's not a free pass to do as you please with your powers."

Yaoyorozu was selected next. "What happens if we come under attack or witness someone in need of help, like a kid falling out of a tree? Can we use our quirks then?"

"No," Mr. Kunikida answered immediately. "You are not to engage in any activity that would require your quirks or put yourselves in harm's way. A staff from ADA will be with you at all times during your stay in Yokohama. We will advise you to take shelter or run if needed but please leave all the fighting or saving others to us."

That made a few of the students uncomfortable. Midoriya could hear the grimaces going around by the shuffling or low chattering noises his classmates made.

Todoroki was up next. "Why do you let the mafia control this city if you have a police force?"

Mr. Kunikida looked at him. After a moment of silence, the man said, "Because while not ideal, that is the best way to maintain balance right now. Yokohama is a city built from a very chaotic history. It has been occupied by many foreign and local powers before. During the rise of quirks, the Japanese government was busy dealing with the issues that arises from a superpowered population. From prosecuting anybody with a quirk in witch burns to the protests of equal rights and adjusting infrastructures to fit the ever changing needs, Yokohama had been neglected in this process. While resources and money were needed to take down villains on the outside, there was just nothing left to rebuild Yokohama after the wars."

Japan wasn't always a wealthy country. There were periods of famine and other disastrously dark times. Those were facts in history that everybody who passed junior high would know.

"Many had to fight to stay alive and while organized crime isn't good, they were the ones who built this city back. Port Mafia had a heavy hand in rebuilding Yokohama and many other unsavory characters also kept the villains—both the quirked kind and the foreign invaders—out. Whether that be out of a desire to keep their share of profits or for another reason, they've kept the ill impact of quirks out of the normal citizen's lives. Mostly." Mr. Kunikida pushed his glasses up higher, a cold shine reflecting off the silver edge of his frames as they passed under arched trees. "The government controls the day while Port Mafia has the night. Meanwhile, ADA serves to guard the twilight hours to minimize harm. That is the system we have in place."

Todoroki nodded. He didn't try to argue back because it was a lot of information to take in. At least, Midoriya would assume that was why. Mr. Kunikida was making sense but it was as if they were trying to understand video game logic or watching the worldbuilding play out in the exposition of a sci-fi movie. Those rules were absurd in a way that only made sense if they were fictional.

"Rabbi, Mr. Kunikida, I have a question." Tsuyu waved her hand. The frog girl poked her head out from behind a seat too. "Day, night, twilight...that's all three parts of the day but you said we also needed to watch out for the Dragon. What do they do then?"

"Maybe it's an actual dragon?" Kaminari quietly whispered from his spot by the window next to Todoroki. "Hides in a cave most of the time and only comes out to steal gold or princesses."

Aizawa-sensei coughed from the seat in front of the blond teen. Kaminari zipped his mouth immediately. His video game reference did help ease the atmosphere a little though. Some of the girls even giggled.

Mr. Kunikida's expression softened slightly too. "The Dragon won't be hostile as long as you don't cause him trouble. He does like amassing wealth though and he rarely leaves his headquarters. He's...more of a wildcard. The Dragon helps whichever side that can bring him more profit or keep Yokohama stable."

"Sounds like a sleazy businessman," commented Sero.

Midoriya imagined a middle-aged man with giant gold rings on all his fingers. Somebody who was well-kept but in a kind of oily way. Hair slicked back with gel and expansive suits, he'd have a very pretentious taste of classics or a strong love for tacky furniture that showed off wealth. Maybe not the stereotypical mustache twirling villain face but the man in Midoriya's imagination certainly didn't appear nice.

As the bus drove through mountain ranges, they fired off their questions one by one. Mr. Kunikida answered what he could and the class started relaxing too. The kids shared food amongst each other, taking out earphones and music while excitedly chatting about what they just learned.

"Hey, Bakubro, you okay back there?" Kirishima turned his head, checking on Katsuki who insisted on sitting at the very back of the bus alone. "You've been pretty quiet. That's so unlike you."

Not even a single curse word popped out of Katsuki's mouth so far.

"I'm fucking fantastic, Shitty Hair." Oh, there it was. "There's nothing much to ask. You all are chirping and yelping nonstop. Old Four Eyes up there already went through two bottles of water."

"Old?" Mr. Kunikida's eyebrows twitched but he merely sighed. From the way his mouth moved, Midoriya assumed he was muttering something about teenagers these days.

The green haired teen glanced back, seeing Kacchan leaning back into his seat while appearing grumpy and annoyed. Red eyes met his gaze for a split second but that sharp gaze quickly moved away to focus back on Kirishima.

“Besides, I only trust what I see with my own eyes,” snarled Katsuki.

That was true. They shouldn’t make judgements based on one source of information. It made sense for Kacchan to be suspicious too. He had always been sensitive and untrusting. Ever since Midoriya could remember, the blond never gave his heart out to anybody fully even as friends. Bakugou Katsuki was always separating himself from the masses, scaring others off with his hot temper or potty mouth or just shoving people out of his way in general.

Mr. Kunikida didn’t appear mad after hearing that. He only nodded curtly before turning to converse quietly with Aizawa-sensei about hotels they would stay in.

"But it's Yokohama!" Kirishima pressed while trying to pass Katsuki some chocolates. "You can at least be a little more excited."

"It's just another fucking ugly city. There's nothing exciting about that."

"I'm sure it's got cool places. Come on, man. Cheer up."

Katsuki glowered at him. Tossing the chocolates back at the redhead, he muttered, "Don't get your hopes up."

"What a sour attitude," Mineta commented but Bakugou only turned his head towards the window and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

The bus started pulling out of the thick forest with its curving roads. As the roads became wider, they saw the ocean on their right. Sparkling waves melted with the bright blue sky at the far end of the horizon. Afar, ships tooted their horns while birds crossed the sky. It was a lovely sight that everybody took pictures of or gushed at.

Even sitting in the bus, they could feel the warmth of the sun on their skin. When Mineta rolled down a window, a refreshing breeze swept over everybody’s senses. It smelled distinctively of summer, salty and beachy.

The entrance to Yokohama was just ahead. Midoriya could see why Yokohama could seal itself off or why not a lot of people would want to try to enter the city now. The side of the road closer to the ocean were steep cliffs while the other was thick forest terrain. It was dangerously easy to get lost after so many curves and turns on the only road leading up to a military checkpoint in front of the tunnel. That was the only official way into the city.

Four armed officers were there to direct traffic. As the bus inched closer, Midoriya saw a fifth person in the small booth beside the tunnel. The young man was roughly in his twenties and he was in a red military uniform. It was different from the others. His tunic’s style was older like it was from the Taisho era and he had a cape. A higher rank? Maybe special forces? But there were no medals or other types of identifier as normal soldiers had.

“I’m kind of scared,” Sato admitted while their bus came to a stop to allow Mr. Kunikida to show the officers some kind of document.

The man in the red uniform came out. Unlike most of the military recruits, his hair was a wild mess that pointed in every direction despite how he pressed his hat down. There were three markings under his left eye, which didn’t look like a scar or a tattoo.

“Suehiro.” Mr. Kunikida nodded at him. “Here to double check?”

“The captain doesn't want any surprises.” The man came on the bus. Maybe it was the uniform or the sword at his waist but he was immediately more intimidating than Mr. Kunikida. After observing the students for a few minutes, he started checking under the seats. He was meticulous but quick.

Then he stopped in front of Kacchan.

“Are you the one with the explosion quirk?” he questioned.

“You got a problem with that?” barked back the teen. Midoriya could feel his heart squeezing tight. Kacchan always had an attitude problem. It was okay on the outside because he had an amazing quirk and stellar grades. The adults favored him greatly but Midoriya wasn’t sure how that would fly in Yokohama. They weren’t dealing with people who would mindlessly praise Kacchan anymore. This man...although Midoriya wasn’t sure if he was an ability user or had a quirk or not, he was a soldier guarding Yokohama.

This man had to be strong in some aspect to be able to do this job.

The soldier shook his head, expression unreadable as he leaned in closer. “I just need to warn you that explosions might set off dangerous reflexes in certain locals. If you need to spark off excess sweat, try to do it in private or away from crowds. It’s very easy to spook people or accidentally start a stampede.” He placed a hand on the teen's shoulder. "Am I understood?"

Katsuki frowned but he grunted a response.

Suehiro walked off the bus and checked under the bus too before giving an all clear.

They were allowed to pass.

“Okay, kids.” Mr. Kunikida turned around as everything darkened inside the tunnel. They could still see because of the sparse lights on the ceiling but cold sweat also dripped down their backs as the shadows crawled over them. “Your phones will deactivate once inside Yokohama. It will only have access to emergency lines. Don’t be alarmed though. We will provide your class president with a local phone that you can contact us with.”

“What?”

“Why?”

“Are you going to confiscate our phones?”

The class erupted but the man shook his head, gesturing for them to calm down. “We don’t want you to be posting about this trip online. As you’ve been targeted by villains before, we really don’t want to advertise your presence in Yokohama in case it attracts more criminals here. As you will all be together, there is no need for you to contact anybody.”

“What about our parents?” Iida yelled.

“If you need to contact them, you can do that through your teachers.”

Okay, at least they weren’t cutting them off from the outside world completely.

“But what if—”

“No buts. No what ifs. You will do as we say or this is where the field trip ends.”

“Can you explain why that military dude knew Bakugou’s quirk then?” another voice piped up. This one might be Tokoyami’s.

“Your information was shared with us prior to this trip.” Mr. Kunikida’s voice was still calm. “Due to Yokohama’s more sensitive businesses, we needed to assess the full extent of the risks before agreeing to hosting you.”

“That’s really unreasonable and creepy,” somebody whispered. Although their voice was meek and small, in the silence that followed it might as well have been blasted over a megaphone.

“Unreasonable is how to ensure you all will survive in Yokohama.”

They were reaching the end of the tunnel and light spilled down upon them again. Yet, the warmth of the sun didn’t chase away any tension. Besides the ocean and the cityscape, five pitch black towers greeted them. The towers stood taller than the rest of the buildings surrounding it. They weren’t like normal skyscrapers either, with clear windows or shiny signs and relaxing balconies. These ones were like five pillars drilled into the center of the city. Their surfaces were smooth, with the glint of polished metal. The noise of the city filtered through Mineta’s open window. Cars, horns, people...a city of old came into view.

“Welcome to Yokohama,” said Mr. Kunikida.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the comments/kudos/bookmarks. I'm slower in replying due to busy life but it brings a smile to my face when I read them throughout the day :)

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Since there's less angst in this fic, I want to let the UA kids explore Yokohama with a bit more detail.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

The ADA's office was rather bland.

Maybe they were expecting too much or thinking too negatively. There was certainly charm to the detectives' headquarters. It had a vintage feeling to it. Stationed at the corner of a street, it was a brick building where the lower level belonged to a cafe. A whiff of sweetly baked goods and coffee accompanied them during the elevator ride upstairs.

Inside, the agency had everything an office should have. The partitioned desks and opened floor plan, whiteboards, glass windows, cabinets of snacks and everything else that it took to run a business. The window was opened to allow breezes to brush in. A fan from the ceiling turned, urging the hot summer air out. It kind of reminded Midoriya of the teacher's lounge of Aldera Middle. Unlike UA or the other schools on the outside though, the monitors here were the older models and there were a lot more paper files than what the students were used to. Some folders were stacked randomly while others had the corners stained with suspicious red ink.

Maybe that made sense. This was the city of the old. There were no hologram monitors jumping out at them around the corner or high tech that piled in corners like the support classes. Yokohama couldn't get hacked if none of the important information was online.

"Sorry about the mess," a boy slightly older than them apologized with a sheepish smile from behind a desk. His hair was gray with a streak of black. However, his bangs were slanted in a weird and uneven angle. Slim and pale, he had beautiful eyes that faded from a gradient of purple into gold. "I'm Atsushi, welcome to the agency."

When he stood up, Midoriya noticed that he was only a bit taller than him. He wore a plain white shirt and dark pants that were clipped in place with suspenders. A black tie dangled loosely around his neck. Instead of leather shoes that most officer workers preferred, he had boots and fingerless gloves.

Midoriya didn't see any weapons on him. In fact, he didn't see any weapons in the office or on any of the employees either. The "Armed" Detective Agency. Why were they named that? Was it just because they had ability users amongst their ranks?

There was also a woman with dark hair that came down just above her shoulders. She was dressed more business formal, with a white dress shirt and a long black dress. Yosano Akiko—

the doctor of ADA—wore red heels and her hands were covered by black gloves. She had a pretty face too if not a little intimidating with her sharp smile. From the corner of his eyes, Midoriya saw Sero immediately covered Mineta's mouth to prevent any possible inappropriate comments from leaking out.

“Our others members are currently out on a job,” Mr. Kunikida said. “Atsushi here will take you all to the conference room where we will provide you with a more detailed run down of what to expect.”

There was nothing special about the conference room either except that it was large enough to fit all of them comfortably. Atsushi offered everybody tea while Mr. Kunikida stood at a whiteboard to begin explaining more. Meanwhile, an orange-haired detective sat at the back of the group. He looked like he was in his early twenties. When he smiled, his hazel eyes turned into half-crescents while revealing white teeth. The way he dressed was almost too casual; Jeans, an oversized sweater, and a red jacket tied around his waist...he looked like any other university kid on the streets. He said to call him “Tanizaki” and he was the one that accompanied Class B's bus into Yokohama.

Mr. Kunikida said Yokohama had access to outside television and other media or resources, so they shouldn't get too freaked out if a few people recognized them on the streets. Aizawa-sensei and Vlad-sensei didn't seem to like that information very much but neither said anything. The two men stood next to Tanizaki. Aizawa-sensei was in a black suit with his hair combed and tied back. He cleaned up properly since they were representing UA. Vlad-sensei was also in a similar suit and he stood with his arms crossed in front of his chest.

It was strange to see their teachers out of their hero costumes. Since they were coming to Yokohama, Principal Nedzu had advised all of them to be in civilian clothing. None of them could bring any hero gear.

“Please note that under no circumstances are you allowed to use your quirks in public.” Midoriya felt like Mr. Kunikida's eyes landed on him for a second too long when the warning was given. “This rule is the same as you would have on the outside but here, it is extremely important you follow this rule. If you see any unrest or dispute on the streets, do not try to intervene. Contact the cops immediately and stay low.”

They were only students who hadn't gotten their licenses yet so of course public quirk usage wasn't allowed. Most of Mr. Kunikida's warning was a repeat of what he said on the bus, just with a more detailed explanation about his expectations of what fell under “heroic” actions. Picking up litter was alright. Calling the police or alerting staff when they see someone shoplifting was alright. Jumping into the road to stop a car accident was a no. Running after thieves themselves was a big fat no. Seeing suspicious people and trying to question them? They better not dare.

Kendo from Class B raised her hand. “We can't use our quirks even if we are attacked?”

“If you follow our rules, you will not be attacked,” Mr. Kunikida stated but his answer didn't sit well with the students. Raising his hand, he gestured for them to settle down. “A guide from our agency will be with your groups at all times when you are in the city. It is essential that none of you use your quirks in case you provoked the wrong people.”

“Wrong people...like Port Mafia?”

“Not just them. There are other ability users living in Yokohama and some of them do have a temper. They will not take being attacked or insulted kindly.”

“Mr. Kunikida?” Kaminari raised his volume slightly to get the man’s attention. “I know we kind of already asked this on the bus but why don’t the police arrest the criminals if everyone knows they are the bad guys? Or why don’t the criminals try to take down the government?”

“Again, it’s because of balance,” the man answered while writing a few things down inside his notebook. He shared a glance with Tanizaki, probably to confirm if the other man already explained anything to Class B. “In this city, two major powers run the show. The government and Port Mafia are like light and shadow, one cannot exist without another. Because of our unique history, right now Port Mafia has the upperhand. If they were taken down in a rush then it would send the whole city into a state of utter chaos. Same goes for the government. Port Mafia has no intention of interfering with the city’s basic operations so they will not aim to overthrow it completely. They have a peace treaty.”

A look of confusion flushed itself over every student’s face.

“That doesn’t make a lot of sense,” one of the kids in the back said.

Criminals were villains and in their world, all villains wanted to do was destruction. They don’t care who gets hurt or if order was disrupted. And why would heroes walk away from villains? That made no sense to them.

“Even if there are no heroes to defeat the villains, police are supposed to make arrests...aren’t they?” Shinsou questioned too. “You make it sound like they negotiate with criminals and make deals to let the bad guys go free.”

Kunikida sighed but he quickly regained his composure as if he expected this to happen.

“It’s a complicated matter. Not all villains are into complete chaos and destruction. The villains you are used to are generally individuals looking for fame and fortune, maybe revenge too. Here, organized crime is the majority.” He looked up at the door. “Dazai and Ranpo-san have returned.”

They all turned around and saw a young man with short messy black hair coming in. This man looked as if an old English detective had walked out of an old picture. He had thin eyes and wore a brown Inverness cape with long white socks and a blazer. Behind him, there was a taller man with wavy dark brown hair and a long sand coloured trench coat over his suit. Although decently handsome, there were bandages poking out from underneath his sleeves.

All of the ADA members they’ve met so far were either pale or slim or both. None of them looked like they could even last one of Ojiro’s punches. No one amongst them carried any firearms or other sorts of weapons either. At least, not that Midoriya could see.

“Oh, you must be the UA kids! I’m Dazai Osamu,” the taller man introduced himself enthusiastically. “It sure is a nice day to take a dive into the river, won’t you all agree?”

Mr. Kunikida smacked him in the head immediately.

“Um, why are you hitting him?” Aoyama asked. “Your colleague is saying it’s a good day for a swim and you hit him over it...shouldn’t that count as workplace violence?”

The detectives all paused for a second before bursting out laughing. Even Dazai laughed.

“...Did I say something wrong?” the blond teen turned to face the rest of his peers but most people all shook their heads.

“He was suggesting today would be a good day to drown to death. You dumbasses were going to agree,” Kacchan grumbled while rolling his eyes and some people gasped. Aoyama shut up while shrinking himself behind Shoji.

Suicide? Was it normal custom to greet people they just met with suicide invitations in Yokohama? That didn’t seem right.

Dazai slipped between the crowd like a fish and before anyone knew it, he patted Aoyama on the shoulder. “Don’t worry, I want to commit double suicide with a beautiful woman. I’m not interested in ugly men or young girls.” With a twirl, he wrapped an arm around Katsuki’s shoulder. “And you, quite an observation. How did you know what I was referring to?”

Red eyes locked with violet ones before Katsuki shook the man’s arm off roughly.

“His attitude and your bandage is loose.”

It was true. The white bandage around Dazai’s wrist had come undone and beneath the white, there was a thin line of red.

This man had tried to slit his own wrist. By the state of the redness on his wrist, it was an unsuccessful but fresh cut. The realization made Midoriya's mouth hung open slightly, a reaction mirrored by many of the other students.

Dazai smiled, pulling on the bandages as if the teen only pointed out a loose button. “You have sharp eyes.”

As if to prevent them from diving deeper into why Dazai tried to kill himself, the other young man was introduced as Ranpo. “I’m the best detective in the world,” he said while busy ransacking the cabinets for sweets.

There was a very careless atmosphere between the detectives. They didn’t appear concerned over Dazai’s suicide attempt. Also, why would they let somebody who just tried to end their life back on the job so quickly? Wasn’t that dangerous? Weren't they friends with each other? Shouldn't somebody bring him to a therapist or a doctor?

How cruel and callous.

Midoriya looked at the detectives' smiling faces, silently wondering how they can act so heartless.

“They don’t look like a bad bunch,” Atsushi said sheepishly after the UA students and staff were all escorted to the hotel. The outsiders would be staying in a nice place close by, courtesy of the Special Division of Unique Powers’ arrangement and UA’s large budget. It was easier to keep track of everybody if each class occupied one floor of the hotel. “President Fukuzawa said Kyoka would watch them tonight.”

Disguised as one of the hotel maids. The students would probably feel more at ease to see someone younger than them around than Port Mafia’s staff or the government’s people. It was a test to help Kyoka become more comfortable around people too. While not the most talkative, the young girl was reliable when it came to work. Her only shortfall was that she wasn’t used to interacting with people. Since she was ex-mafia, her life before ADA consisted of killing people. After ADA, plenty of the detective’s work required fighting too. It would be nice to let her have a job where no blood needed to be bled.

Most importantly, they didn’t want to make the outsiders too uncomfortable, feeling as if they were under constant surveillance even though they were. Atsushi didn’t dislike the UA members. He was only eighteen and he rarely interacted with people his age outside of the agency. It was a bit weird to see people with such strange skin colors or abnormal bodies. Since this was Yokohama, Atsushi had never seen so many people with quirks (who weren’t trying to kill him) gathered in one place before.

However, he had been working at ADA for some time now and he easily picked up a few cues from both his colleagues and the UA students during their meeting.

“It must be a cultural shock to them. They looked very uncomfortable when we talked about Port Mafia and the other ability users.” While Atsushi didn’t agree with plenty of Port Mafia’s beliefs or systems, he couldn’t say he didn’t understand where some of those actions stemmed from.

“Of course. Every time they litter outside, there’s probably a muscular weirdo in tights ready to pound on them. All the corruption and nasty stuff can be quite hard to see under the blinding spotlight.” Dazai yawned while stretching out on the sofa. “They were listening... but I can’t guarantee how much they actually took anything to heart.”

“Don’t jinx it,” Yosano chided from her chair next to the sofa. The doctor fixed the butterfly pin in her hair while kicking Dazai’s leg lightly. “While I don’t mind having to fix a few of them, I’d rather I don’t have to.”

“I didn’t even say anything other than expressed my concern!” protested Dazai.

“You’re thinking about it. I can feel it. No tricks and no manipulation. Keep away from those kids.” She leaned back into her chair, looking at Ranpo and then back at Dazai. “So, anything you two geniuses noticed that we need to beware of?”

“Not really,” Ranpo said. Opening a bag of chips, he tilted his head at Dazai. “They’re nervous, a little jumpy, confused...all the normal reactions. The one with the bird head had something trying to come out of his shirt when he got spooked, which is probably just his

quirk. The teachers don't trust us at all though. Endeavor's son was calm but he certainly had a defiant fire in him, so keep an eye on him too. The only other ones that I'd say is more important are—"

"—the blond kid and the green haired one," Dazai finished for him. "We've all seen the Sports Festival video. Midoriya Izuku's scarred hands showed the effects of his quirk too. That strength can almost rival All Might's and it would be problematic if it was used in this city. As for Bakugou Katsuki, I guess you really can't judge a book by its cover. He looks abrasive and talks like a thug but he notices things a little too well. So Atsushi, you can keep watch of both Bakugou and Midoriya starting tomorrow."

The man smiled brightly while pointing at Atsushi.

"M-me?" Atsushi scratched his head. "Sure, but why me specifically?"

"Because they are the good guys," Dazai said as a matter of fact, his expression unchanged while he stared at Atsushi, "and you're terrible at lying so I think their problems might be one you can relate to."

"Problems?"

"I'll give you a hint: Midoriya was quirkless until recently. Bakugou noticed my wound immediately when everybody else was taken aback by Kunikida hitting me."

The boys came from outside of Yokohama. This society of the glamorous modern age was one that placed a heavy emphasis on the quirk someone was born with. Some quirks were villainous, others deemed heroic...and then there were the quirkless. It was a strange world out there. They grouped people according to the strength of their powers while looking down at those weaker. There was a label to be placed on everybody according to how their quirks manifested, as if people were only worth something if they could be heroes. However, they also feared those stronger than them.

Everybody needed to be one of a kind but none should be unique.

Atsushi grew up in an orphanage, where abuse and bullying were common. He understood isolation well too. He knew that sometimes people were sensitive or observant not because they were born that way but because it was a necessity.

"I'll do my best," he promised.

Dazai sat up suddenly and pulled out his phone. "Good. Now let's check if Francis had his side set up."

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, he was an ability user from America. This man started a secret society type of organization called "Guild". He came to Yokohama looking for The Book, a mythical device thought to be able to make anyone's dreams come true. It was prophesied by another ability user to be sealed somewhere in Yokohama. After Francis's group failed to raid Yokohama, the man took over a security company that specializes in facial recognition softwares while trying to rebuild his forces. Technically, he had eyes all over Yokohama.

Francis wasn't a good man. He would gladly kill in order to gain what he wanted but he was also a businessman.

There was no way he'd let such a great opportunity to observe the hero students slip by.

When Dazai's call connected, the first thing they heard from the man on the other side was a laugh.

"I expected you to call earlier," Francis said. The American had a slight accent when he spoke Japanese but his grasp on the language was nearly fluent. "If you're worried about me selling the UA students' information on the dark web, you don't have to worry about that. I don't think the League of Villains can pay the price."

"But you do have the kids and the pro heroes' faces registered in your tracking system all over Yokohama."

"Not all of it. I don't have cameras in Suribachi," sighed Francis with faked disappointment. "You know how Huang is. When I tried to buy Huang Corp like I did with your agency, he didn't get mad. He told me to fire my financial appraiser because the amount of money wasn't enough and I should present a ten-year business plan too. Talking business with him is...a torture, I must say."

Especially so when they went with the intention of declaring war or mock Huang Corp. Francis's offer had insulted Fukuzawa and Mori, for even daring to think that money can purchase the hearts of Yokohama. Nobody expected the leader of an organization to actually *consider* his offer and pointed out the areas that were lacking.

Although straight to the point, every yen would be factored in too. Nobody can take a coin out from under the dragon's claw if he didn't want to give. At least, that was what Atsushi heard. Atsushi only met Huang Zeku once before. When Francis planned to level Yokohama by dropping a warship out of the sky, the Dragon of Suribachi finally had enough.

"Get out of my part of the city, you pest."

His words were ice dragging into people's skin. It was a miracle that Francis was even alive so no wonder the man didn't want to push his cameras into Suribachi City.

"But while I might not be selling any information to the outside villains," Francis continued. There was a noise of liquid beside him, probably from the pop and swirl of red wine being poured into glass. "I can't guarantee nothing will leak. The kids do have quite memorable faces and this is Yokohama."

"We'll worry about that," Dazai replied easily. It sounded like the cameras were a safety measure then. If they did lose one of the kids, they could request Francis to search for them through his system. "This should be a very fun two weeks."

Oh, no.

Atsushi felt like they all needed a vacation away from heroics already.

Chapter End Notes

I have a fun idea of how to insert Q (another BSD character) into this fic...hehehe (yes, this is my evil laugh), excited to get to some action scenes next chapter.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1

Katsuki spilled his luggage out on the bed. The hotel was booked for them for two weeks. It would be a hassle to have to constantly rampage through his bag or suitcase for stuff. After hanging up his jacket and placing everything else he needed away on autopilot, he stopped by the window to the balcony.

This hotel wasn't anything overly fancy. It was a nice twenty-stories building that mingled into the cityscape perfectly with its gray exterior. The boys had one side of the hall while the girls' rooms were across. Class B would be on the floor below them too.

Katsuki's room had a great view of the ocean. The square window perfectly captured the scene of striking blue ocean meeting the orange sky upon the horizon line. White walls and wooden floors, there were two beds in the room with a spacious closet and a place to sit. There was also the basics, like a kettle and a microwave over a cabinet beside the TV. A second door led to the bathroom, which was well-stocked with free soap and towels.

They were assigned to the room in pairs, which Katsuki was uncomfortable with. He didn't like the idea of sharing private space but it was a school field trip, he expected this to happen. Budgeting issues, easier to keep track of the students, or team-bonding and all the other fun stuff, there were tons of reasons for him to have to share space with others. At least Katsuki was only sharing with Kirishima, not all thirteen of the other boys in his class.

It would be even more hellish if they were stuck in one giant room with the Class B guys.

Only Shitty Hair. I can do this.

Clenching his teeth, he could feel the pressure of his bite on the back of his teeth. By sheer luck of a draw, the two of them got the room at the very end of the hall. It was more secluded than the others. Kirishima dropped his bag on his bed before rushing out, wanting to check out the hotel with Sero and Kaminari. The group did invite Katsuki to join them but he rejected the idea.

Katsuki wasn't sure if he could play everything cool if he had to be stuck with so many of his classmates twenty-four seven for the entire two weeks. Maybe it wouldn't be as bad if they went on a field trip to literally anywhere else in the world but they were in Yokohama.

He can't afford any mistakes in Yokohama.

Not when he was right under the ADA's eyes, knowing that Port Mafia was behind it all, and with the government agents watching their every move...he just can't relax in this state.

Slowly, he walked onto the balcony. Nothing jumped out at him. No villains attacked him and there weren't bombs going off underneath his feet. Katsuki was greeted by the noise of the city in a pleasant manner. There was music from the restaurants and people conversing with each other in the streets. If he placed his hand on the balcony's railing, he could almost feel the rumble of cars rolling by. The honk of their horns mixed with the noise of the port. Cargos being delivered on giant trucks and somewhere across the road, there were people working away in their cubicles, typing frantically on their computers.

He didn't think there was a day where he would stand on this land like he was now. It was surreal to be in Yokohama out in the open like this.

Sighing, Katsuki lowered his gaze. People looked like miniature toys from up here, something to be easily picked up and positioned as he wished. It reminded him of how he used to play with action figures. In the sandbox at the playground, where the kids of the neighborhood gathered with their hero merchandise, they'd make a stage with twigs and leaves or stones. Little All Might saved the day once again.

There was no All Might to save Yohokama.

But Katsuki supposed the world never stopped playing the same game no matter how old they got. The stage only got bigger and the players were no longer made of plastic. As he stared at the ADA's headquarters across the street, he couldn't help but think.

Their teachers would meet with the detectives in private tonight. It made sense for them to chat with the head of ADA before the classes started shadowing the detectives on the job. The men would go back and forth with each other, trying to probe for information but eventually, the pro heroes would walk away unsatisfied.

Aizawa-sensei and Vlad-sensei knew they were being watched. The pros would have noticed it as soon as they entered this city, especially when the ones in the dark barely had any intention of hiding it. Katsuki counted six suits, just enough eyes to study all of the students at the same time without being too obvious.

That was just the in-person surveillance though. Katsuki didn't want to start counting how many were watching behind a screen or through other means. It would be weird if none of these caught his face so he stayed on the balcony for a bit longer. While scrolling his phone mindlessly, he counted the seconds between switching traffic lights. Of course, as the detectives said, his phone was a useless block of metal right now. The screen remained black no matter what he did.

"Fucking hell," he cursed loudly as he shoved his phone back in his pocket. His anger should be expressive enough, a clear sign of frustration but not over the top like a clown's act. It should be enough to earn a passing grade because of his reputation.

There was no way the powers of Yokoahama didn't research every single one of the UA members before they entered this city. They would know how the outsiders viewed Katsuki: Loud, anger issues, boastful, swelling with ego, and all the other fun stuff. A teenager with teenage problems; like an attachment to his devices or a love for dark clothing. An outsider

with outsider views; he wanted to be a hero and unable to distinguish between a “villain” and a “criminal”.

When the traffic light turned green again, Katsuki held onto the railing tighter as his head was woozy from the glare of the sun. Behind the curtain of sunlight, a blurry outline of somebody fell from the roof of another building. It was just a trick of light. There were no screaming bystanders or emergency vehicles rushing down the road.

No corpse right in front of him either of course.

Still, Katsuki couldn't shake the feeling of sticky hot blood spraying across his skin. The red leaked into the pavement beneath, dripping along the slanted crack of concrete by the sidewalk.

Not now.

He tried to focus on happier things. A new lotus that bloomed. Koi fishes swimming happily in a pond. Rows of books on a shelf that he promised he'd get to reading one day. Dim sun. Steaming congee. A bottle of his favorite spice next to a jar of homemade pickled radish.

“Bakugou!”

Kirishima was by their hotel door.

“What?” Katsuki asked while slamming the balcony door shut.

“We're getting dinner. Aizawa-sensei wants everybody present before we go down to the restaurant together.” Kaminari popped his head out from behind Kirishima.

The rest of the class were headed towards the elevator, their footsteps drowning out the noise of the city.

Katsuki grabbed his jacket. “Alright, I'm coming.”

When he stepped out, he saw his classmates following a hotel staff. She was young, probably only around middle school age so the Class A girls were chatting with her. Normally, children this young wouldn't be working unless their family owned the business. However, this girl wasn't like that. It was common for children to work in Yokohama. The war forced the young to grow up fast and gang violence produced many orphans.

“If I don't work, I won't have a place anywhere,” the girl said. Her name tag read: Izumi Kyoka. Dressed in a simple maid's uniform that came down to her ankles, her dark hair was parted into low twin-tails with floral pins. Blue eyes stared up at Uraraka and the other girls. Although she didn't smile much, Katsuki could already see his classmates' hearts sobbing for her. Even Mineta had enough sympathy to not try to flirt. He might be staring at the maid's outfit with creepy thoughts but at least his hands were to himself and no drool leaked from his mouth.

Orphaned and working to make a living when she was only fourteen. A pitiful backstory and such a tragedy. This was no place for making any moves.

“Kyoka-chan is very strong and brave,” Asui complimented while patting the girl on the shoulder. “Have you considered moving out of Yokohama? You’re a minor. There are many ways the heroes can connect you to social aid.”

Katsuki wanted to blast the frog girl. Who the fuck asks somebody they just met to unroot everything they’ve ever known? If life was bad then just move? Yeah. Genius. Why didn’t the retard living that sad life think of that before?

Also, foster care and orphanages were two things that Yokohama locals knew to stay the hell away from. Poor conditions, pit stops for trafficking, general abuse... the list of reasons can go on for days.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.”

“Katsuki, it will be alright.”

“I have friends here,” Kyoka whispered while shaking her head instead of explaining too much. “I don’t want to leave them.”

“What about school? From what you said, it doesn’t seem like you have time for school?”

If the next question from Round Face was about child labor laws. Katsuki was going to bang his head against the wall. Child labor? These bastards of Yokohama were lucky to be alive. Not to mention, what kind of assassin ever worked a nine to five routine? Make an appointment with their target? Hey, I’m coming to kill you at ten, we cool? No? How about eleven thirty then? I got a team meeting at twelve so the afternoon doesn’t really work for me.

Fucking hell.

His mind was going a thousand miles per minute now and Katsuki was getting a headache. Still, he kept his mouth shut while hanging behind Kirishima.

“Just act stupid. It will be fine.”

He tried to tune the conversations out. The hem of Kyoka’s dress swayed when she walked. It didn’t brush the ground but there was a heaviness to her skirt and apron that shouldn’t be there. Katsuki saw Todoroki staring at the girl’s back with a bit of a suspicious frown. He probably noticed how the wrinkles didn’t appear quite right when the girl walked.

There was something hidden under her dress.

Todoroki wouldn’t know what it was exactly but he suspected danger. Katsuki, however, could tell it was a sword.

But neither of them said a thing as their group met up with Class B.

Everybody looked a bit more relaxed since they got to talk to each other and saw their living conditions. It was already better than what most were expecting. Nobody expected a city

ruled by villains to have clean water and nice hotels. Most of them were speculating warzone ruins or a Battle Royale in the wild.

Poverty. Famine. Danger. An open air black market of lawlessness.

That was Yokohama in the world's eyes.

Why couldn't it have been enough to keep the outsiders away?

2

Mr. Kunikida and everybody else in the agency were nice. While a few of them were kind of odd (like Dazai, who kind of creeped everybody out), they were all quite courteous and ready to answer any questions.

They seemed like regular people too. Some liked sweets, others were quiet and shy, and they bickered over trivial stuff or complained over paperwork. The coffee shop underneath the agency was also a delight with the best hand brewed coffee Midoriya had ever tasted.

It really wasn't what he expected.

Yokohama wasn't on fire all the time or overrun with villains. There weren't criminals shooting up the streets or ruins burning everywhere. The news talks of crimes but it was the normal stuff. A few burglaries, some speeding cars, maybe a stove fire. It was mostly news about local politicians, weather, and other similar topics that the news on the outside would cover. Although they had to select it manually after messing around with the remote a bit, Yokohama even had the same news channels as the outside.

Some kids in Class B voiced their comfort about knowing that even without their phones, they weren't completely disconnected with the outside world. Midoriya agreed. It was nice to see familiar heroes active on screen.

The rest of Yokohama was even a bit boring compared to most places that the students had been to before. There weren't any famous historical sites like ancient temples or amazing structures like the creations on I-Island. It wasn't like Paris or other well-known vacation cities overseas, with foreign experiences of romantic charm around every corner.

The detectives didn't take them along to solve crimes immediately. Instead, Atsushi and Tanizaki gave them a tour of Yokohama. They passed by the library, the largest shopping mall, and went to the beach. For a sightseeing adventure, it wasn't bad. It was kind of fun and relaxing even with the occasional strange stares from the locals.

Now they were taking a rest at the cafe while Tanizaki checked in with Mr. Kunikida. Aizawa-sensei and Vlad-sensei sat across from Atsushi at the table closest to the door while the students spread themselves out. It looked like they were the only customers in the cafe for now, filling the shop up so the owner went to change the sign by the door.

"Is this it?" Tetsutetsu blurted out loud and immediately got elbowed by Tsuburaba.

"Don't be rude," Kendo hissed at her classmate too. She glanced at Atsushi.

The older boy shook his head. “Don’t worry about me. Yokohama must be very different from what they tell you on the outside.”

“I think what Tetsutetsu meant was...” Monoma paused a bit before scooting closer to Atsushi. The blond from Class B was probably working an angle. He hadn’t been taunting Class A like he usually would. Putting class rivalry aside for the bigger picture. “Yokohama looks very peaceful. No wonder you guys said you don’t need heroes. But how does that work? Is the crime rate lower because there are more quirkless people? What happens when people break the law?”

But Principal Nedzu showed them the data on Yokohama and the crime rate was very high. There was no reason for their principal to lie to them. Also, even countryside little towns had heroes stationed. Why would Yokohama reject additional help?

“Our police take care of most of the criminals. If people break the law, they go to jail of course. However,” Atsushi explained in a sincere tone as a slight crease worked its way between his brows, “some people are stopped.”

“Stopped?”

“Killed.”

The clarification silenced the cafe.

“It obviously isn’t ideal,” Atsushi added in a hurry. He scratched his head, looking nervous. “But sometimes, things happen. The cops and Hunting—military personnels—have to make tough decisions on the spot. It’s the same for us at ADA. We can’t save everybody but we can try to help the majority.”

He made sense. Except for the strange near slip of tongue, Midoriya couldn’t find fault in Atsushi’s reasoning. Even All Might had situations that he regretted on the job. There were things just out of people’s control. A second too late. Bad luck. Victims that rejected aid. Laws that allowed people to walk free. The careers of pro heroes or others in law and emergency care were never smooth sailing.

It was an uncomfortable topic that Midoriya hadn’t thought about in depth yet. Judging from the looks on his classmates’ faces, they were all focused on *becoming* a hero than worrying about what possible tough but unspoken challenges they would have to face further down the line.

Midoriya stared at Atsushi’s face. The detective wasn’t that much older than them but he already understood the difficulties of fighting crime in real life. Maybe this was what Principal Nedzu wanted them to realize.

Being a hero was more than having a strong quirk or getting into a good school.

But what was Atsushi going to say? Hunting? Was that the name of a Special Ops group? Maybe it had something to do with the soldier in the red uniform?

He wrote down his thoughts and questions in his notes. Midoriya had gotten a new notebook just before they came on this trip. It would be dedicated to everything he saw in this city. He already wrote a lot about the detectives but he was missing a lot of important information.

Like, what were their abilities? What made their abilities different from a quirk?

“Have you guys noticed that the buildings are kind of new?” Hagakure started a new conversation with some of the other girls at the table in the back. “They are still built plainly but it looks like plenty of them were recent constructions.”

“I thought the buildings here would be older,” admitted Jiro. “They say there were a lot of wars going on back then. I was expecting some of those sites to be preserved.”

“Like a memorial park?” Tokage piped up. If Midoriya remembered correctly, the Class B girl can split herself into smaller floating parts.

“Yeah.”

While plenty of Yokohama was already developed land, there were still giant areas of forests that led to old mines. However, it was difficult to find anything related to past wars in the city. They don’t have monuments for famous people and the library only has records of the basics.

“We did see those five black towers though.” Ojiro leaned the upper half of his body out of the booth to talk to the girls. “They’re huge. Maybe those are the government buildings?”

They haven’t been able to see that area of Yokohama yet.

“Actually, those belong to Port Mafia,” Atsushi said easily.

“What?” Mineta gasped. The other kids also turned to face Atsushi, giving him questioning looks.

“But they’re...right in the center of the city?” Uraraka’s voice was hesitant and confused.

“And they’re gigantic?” Mina exclaimed with similar shock.

Honenui suddenly raised his hand. The Class B boy with pale hair and skeleton-like exposed teeth nearly jumped out of his seat. “Wait! Does Port Mafia really just call themselves Port Mafia? Like, that’s not a nickname people gave them?”

Atsushi tilted his head, seeming more confused than they were. “Yeah. What’s wrong with that?”

How brazen. What kind of criminal group openly admitted they were criminals? They didn’t even bother to hide their base? Were they so confident that they would never get raided? Did they have connections within the police force that allowed this level of corruption? Or was the Yokohama government too weak to say no to any of Port Mafia’s demands?

“Hey, Deku, stop muttering,” Katsuki hissed from behind Midoriya.

Flinching, the green haired boy apologized profusely for having to voice his train of thoughts out loud. He leaned over his notes, hiding them from view out of reflex in fear of it getting destroyed. Although Kacchan hadn't destroyed his notes in a long while, Midoriya still felt the need to protect his hard work. The last time Katsuki saw Midoriya writing about him in middle school and the blond teen absolutely flipped out. He turned the notebook to ashes immediately and even punched Midoriya over it. He got in trouble with his parents after they found out but he never appeared to have regretted his threats.

It was baffling how much Kacchan hated the notes. Midoriya didn't understand why the blond had to make such a big fuss over a harmless hobby. Midoriya wasn't troubling anybody by writing a few words.

"Bakugou," Todoroki warned.

"You didn't have to be so mean," added Uraraka, whose cheeks were puffed up as she glared at Katsuki.

Midoriya felt his heart swell with warmth. The blond teen had made his life difficult. Ever since he could remember, Bakugou Katsuki was always the one who had everything. From good grades to friends and praises, both of his parents were present in his life and they loved him...people adored his confidence and strength. Meanwhile, Midoriya was cast to the side. Like a fly on the wall or a shadow that everyone merely trampled over. Although Midoriya also thought Bakugou was amazing, sometimes he wished he could reach the same heights as the blond.

But for the first time in his life, there were people taking his side instead of mindlessly praising Katsuki. People who won't dismiss Midoriya's pain or suffering. People who cared to listen to him instead of being annoyed like Katsuki was whenever Midoriya tried to talk to him.

They were his *real* friends. Not the neighborhood kids who called Midoriya weird or a crybaby because he wasn't as good at sports. Not the middle school classmates who isolated him for being quirkless. Not Bakugou Katsuki, who only knew how to sneer at and threaten him with violence.

While Midoriya didn't hate Katsuki to the point of wanting him dead, he knew their relationship would probably never get any better. Katsuki was demanding and loud and pushy but also very reclusive. Although he had lackeys in middle school and he let the likes of Kirishima talk him into mutual understandings, he never opened up to anybody.

Sometimes Midoriya even felt bad for those who tried. Trying to befriend Bakugou Katsuki was like hitting a brick wall over and over again before finally getting blasted in the face.

Bakugou huffed while leaning back into his seat. "Whatever. The waitress's been waiting for his order but Deku's nerdy ass was too up in his head to notice."

Waitress?

He looked to the other side, where an older girl with red hair stood. Her hair was tied into two thick braids and she wore the cafe's apron. Her face was full of freckles and she might be

European or American. A pen and a paper pad were in her hands. Instead of smiling, she looked down at him with a blank face and asked, "For the fifth time: what would you like?"

"Oh! I'm so sorry! I'll just have a latte please." His face flushed red. His friends must have been too absorbed in their own conversation to notice her too.

The girl sighed but turned around. "Coming right up."

She ducked behind the counter for a few moments before coming out with their orders. When she passed Atsushi his coffee, Midoriya wasn't sure if it was his imagination or not but the girl seemed to have set the cup down extra hard.

"I really don't know why you stupid detectives are hosting outsiders." Lucy—the waitress—rolled her eyes. "And you hero kids must be out of your minds to be here in Yokohama."

The feisty bite behind her words was surprising.

"Why?" Iida questioned.

Lucy was about to answer when the door slammed open. She turned, yelling "We're—"

"Shut up and give me all the money in the register!" the man who barged in screamed. He was of average build and wore a black ski mask. There were sharp parts protruding out of his forearm but he also had a machine gun.

The teachers jumped up, ready to fight but Atsushi pushed them back. It happened so fast that Midoriya didn't catch how the older teen managed to push two grown men down with his thin arms. An ability related to strength?

The robber raised his gun towards Lucy.

"Watch out!" Kirishima scrambled forward but before his quirk could even activate, he tripped over Katsuki's legs from rushing too fast and fell over the blond teen. They both let out a grunt of pain.

And the gunshot never came.

The man had vanished right in front of their eyes?

"Where did he go?" Monoma yelled. The rest of the kids were either already out of their seats or in the process of shielding their friends from possible fire. Hearing Monoma's question, everybody looked up to see the empty space at the opened door.

"Would you all calm down?" Lucy snapped as she closed the cafe's door. "It was one idiot. You're not supposed to be using your quirks or fighting, isn't that right?"

"Did...did you do something to him?" asked Kendo after sharing a glance with her homeroom teacher. "Are you an ability user?"

Lucy rolled her eyes.

That was when the scenery changed completely. They were no longer in the cafe. The smell of coffee and pastry was gone. Wooden floors were replaced by checkered tiles and the space enlarged. Their coffee cups and tables were switched with giant toys. From stuffed teddy bears to wooden blocks, they were in a room filled with cute things.

“This is my ability.” A giant doll appeared behind Lucy. It was dressed in lace but had thick red threads styled after Lucy’s hair. “Nobody can harm me in Anne’s room.”

There was a wooden door with a circular window. Outside, the cafe was exactly as it was a second ago.

“What’s going on?”

“Where are we?”

People were shouting and some tried punching or scratching the wall to test if it was real. Without their quirks, no excessive damages were dealt but their punches couldn’t even dent the softest toys? Something was wrong!

“Um...guys?” Jiro was next to the door. “There’s the cafe! But the clock’s not moving out there?”

She was right. The cafe’s clock had stopped.

“Did time stop outside?”

“The guy that just tried to rob us is in there!”

Mina pointed to a red door at the other side of the room. Through the slit window near the top, they saw the robber tangled up by wooden hands. It was as if he was being pinned down by a dozen puppets.

“It’s another one,” Atsushi sighed while Lucy scoffed at him.

“Another one of what?” Aizawa-sensei pressed in a stern voice. The two pro heroes had stepped between the students and the two Yokohama locals.

Atsushi gestured towards his arms. “He has a quirk. Ever since news of the villain group... what’re they called again? Right, The League of Villains. Ever since they attacked your school, there have been criminals in Yokohama thinking maybe they should go outside and join the League. Some of them have quirks like that guy, maybe they came from the outside and wanted to get out now. Others are ability users. But if they want to make it out there, they need a bit of funds to get things started so they’ve been targeting businesses around the city. Usually they don’t attack so close to the agency but he might be an outsider.”

That wasn’t good news. The League getting more villains on their side was horrible for the heroes.

“We try to stop as many as we can,” Atsushi continued. “We really don’t want the League or heroes to flood into Yokohama. We’ll hand the guy over to police custody.”

Lucy grumbled something in English but she didn't stop him. The next second, they were all back in the cafe, except for the robber. Atsushi called the police as he said he would.

Meanwhile, Midoriya was fascinated. The first ability they saw in Yokohama was an invincible room? That was so cool! Lucy didn't need any special hand gestures or command to activate it either. How did that work? What was the rationale behind her power? Yaoyorozu turned fat into items. Where did this room and the items inside come from? How was it activated? How did it deactivate? Can it be broken through from the inside? Why a doll?

He was so excited that he didn't notice he was dumping all his questions at the girl in a rant. She kept backing away with every step he took forward. Midoriya stopped of course, turning to write down everything he was thinking before the inspiration escaped him.

"It's a very useful power! If you were a hero—"

"—There's no way I'd ever be a hero!" Lucy barked with a bit of anger.

"Why? It'd be—"

"Okay, Midoriya, please stop." It wasn't until Atsushi grabbed his shoulders that Midoriya snapped out of it.

The pressure on his shoulders wasn't normal. Fingers clenched onto him like claws. Atsushi was just holding him in place. Judging from his relaxed posture, the detective wasn't even exerting too much force.

What was with this grip strength?

He didn't get the chance to ask because Atsushi gently moved him further from Lucy. "It's not polite to be asking so much about another person's powers."

"I-I'm sorry, I got carried away." Midoriya backed away, joining his friends and classmates again.

Atsushi smiled. "It's alright. I think Tanizaki should be coming back soon. We can wait for him outside. We have a bit more sightseeing scheduled before dinner."

They followed, seeing from their teachers' glare that they shouldn't argue with the detectives. The rest of the day was enjoyable and went on without any trouble. It wasn't until after dinner when Midoriya was going over his notes, Todoroki approached him.

"Hey, Midoriya," he called while walking out of the shower. His white and red hair was still dripping water while a towel dangled from his neck.

"What's wrong?"

"Earlier in the cafe... Bakugou was sitting on the outside while Kirishima was towards the inside of the booth, right? And their table was closer to Lucy than ours was."

Midoriya nodded. “Yeah.”

Hearing that answer, Todoroki sank into a short silence before he sat down on Midoriya’s bed. He stared at Midoriya with a stoically serious expression. “Bakugou reacted later than Kirishima, don’t you think that’s kind of weird?”

It was.

“Maybe he’s not feeling well? Do you think we need to let Aizawa-sensei know?” suggested Todoroki.

“Or maybe his quirk didn’t fire up fast enough.” No. Midoriya shook his head immediately after saying that out loud. It was summer and Yokohama was hot. Kacchan’s quirk should be active. “Maybe he’s just following orders. Mr. Kunikida and our teachers were very clear that we can’t react to danger as we were taught at UA. He probably got the same warning we did in private too.”

Being in the criminal’s city made everybody queasy too. Some of their classmates fidgeted more and others were more restrained, especially when they noticed the people of Yokohama staring at their obvious physical mutations. It was interesting to be in a city where the standard for “Normal” was so different from what they were used to. It was like visiting a foreign country where they didn’t speak the language. They understood the people here but were puzzled by their norms.

Even Kacchan was quieter than normal.

While he still cussed and barked orders at people casually, Midoriya didn’t hear any giant outbursts from the blond. It wasn’t strange since Midoriya knew Kacchan *can* follow rules when he wanted to.

But then again, Aizawa-sensei was very scary when the situation demanded it.

Todoroki shrugged. “Yeah, maybe.”

“Good work out there, Atsushi.” Tanizaki smiled while passing his colleague a can of cold orange soda. “How were the pro heroes?”

“They restrained themselves during the last second.” Atsushi passed Tanizaki some napkins while the rest of the agency were sharing pizza. “The students still lack experience so they didn’t react as fast. By the time they were up and ready, Lucy already started the next part of the script. Your illusion of the robber convinced them without problems.”

“That’s too bad,” Dazai said from the desk. “I was hoping you’d be able to compare Eraserheads quirk with my ability.”

Dazai’s ability—No Longer Human—could negate abilities and quirks but he had to touch the other person to do it. Eraserhead’s canceling quirk didn’t require touch to activate but Ranpo theorized it might not be as effective on powerful abilities.

Like one particular slug's gravity for example.

"But we'd probably need to warn Midoriya about his analysis habit..." Yosano poured herself another cup of water. "Can you imagine what would happen if he tried to pick apart the wrong person's ability? Like Akutagawa?"

Kunikida sighed in exasperation while Atsushi groaned. His body ached from the mention of Akutagawa's name alone. The mafia's mad dog would never let the kid live to see another sunrise.

"Please no," the boy begged. "We just need to scare the kids, we don't actually want to kill them!"

At least, he hoped that Port Mafia and the others in the city were on the same page as them.

Or maybe he should start praying that the hero kids were more durable than they looked.

3

As the moon hung high in the sky, a child no older than thirteen ran barefoot across polished tiles. It was a giant room with everything a kid would ever want.

There were art supplies scattered about and half finished drawings all over the floor. Paints, crayons, scissors and paper mixed with toys of all kinds. Video games lined up on the shelves along with story books and textbooks. A large walk-in closet and an ensuite, both well stocked by maids at the start of the month. The bed was comfortable with soft pillows and warm duvets and too many blankets anybody could ever own. At the desk, there were snacks and novels bathing under the silver moonlight that spilled in from the circular window.

In the corner, a metal sword sticking out of a dummy's torso. Razors spilled over the dummy, connected by thin wire that wrapped the blades around the humanoid mannequin's body.

The child moved past it, reaching out a finger as if wanting to test the razor's sharpness but decided against it. It wouldn't be good to get an ouchie or spill blood on his white pajamas.

Or maybe they should do it. If they were hurt, maybe that man will come see them.

No. He wouldn't.

He wouldn't care unless they were actually dying but the same trick wouldn't work twice. If the child died, someone else would occupy this room. Someone more useful. Someone who would own everything the child had now.

They'd hate it if that happened. If they died, nobody would be around to curse that new kid.

So no pain and no wounds. They'd be good. He'd release them eventually. This power they had was a valuable asset. They weren't sure why the man was annoyed either. They just wanted to find a mom.

A dad. A mom. A pet. A child. The perfect family.

If the curse in their veins caused their real parents to fear and hate them, why couldn't they find a new pair to be with? Was it because they weren't like Alice? Should they act more spoiled? Be like Chuuya? Obedient and loyal? Was that what that man would want?

There was no fun in that.

They missed going outside. It had been months since they were allowed to leave the room. It was an endless cycle of waking up and studying but they had a feeling they were going to be released soon.

After all, Yokohama was having *guests*.

And the man was happier lately.

Back and forth, the child moved around their room enthusiastically while dragging a doll behind them.

Unlike most children with their soft plushies or colorful dolls, the one they were holding looked like it came out of a haunted house. It was ugly with large empty eyes of soulless darkness. Ink dripped down its cheeks. Its mouth was skewed, sewn with additional threads to zip its lips shut. The parts where the threads didn't seal tight revealed sharp white teeth. Its head and body were wrapped in bandages or tattered fabric, as if mimicking a zombie or mummy from horror novels.

The child hummed while dressing the doll up with silk ribbons.

A knock came from the door before the locks on it started turning. The sound of metal clattering against metal came from the other side of the door. One by one, the metal locks came undone, rolling or sliding unlock.

"Boss said your house arrest is over," said the woman who opened the door but she didn't show herself in front of the child. "Play nice now, Kyusaku-chan."

The child imagined a pink kimono of cherry blossom pattern on the woman. It would look nice on her but maybe that kind of kimono was too common. They had seen many girls wore similar outfits for their graduations.

The woman would want to be unique, to stand out from the crowd.

The child cocked their head, staring at the opened door. "The hero kids are here?"

"Boss said you can't kill them."

Nothing about *breaking* them then.

They turned to pick out a lotus shaped pendant. The pink crystal gleamed coldly under the moonlight as the child spun it in their hand. "But I can play with them, can I?"

Although the child was young and weaponless, the woman at the door moved further away and her voice grew distant when she answered, "...Yes. With caution and that was an order."

They placed the necklace around their doll and hugged it tight. “Don’t worry,” they cooed while kissing the doll’s forehead. “I’ll do my best.”

It would be difficult to complete the family if they kept getting locked up. Really, not everybody or any random rodent off the street could be their mommy or daddy or a proper pet.

All of them simply break too easily.

They didn’t like such brittle toys so hopefully, the heroes will last a little longer.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed. :)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1

Aizawa was furious.

The frustration that had been building up inside him ever since Nedzu first mentioned the Yokohama field trip had simmered to a near boiling rage. From the start, he was against the idea of having such a field trip. As the homeroom teacher of 1-A, he still had to go through all the reports the other mentoring pro heroes submitted to UA about how the individual interns did. Combining that information, the students' progress, and the final exam gradings, he needed to devise a better teaching plan to help his students for the next school year. Not to mention, they had an intense training camp planned later in the summer.

Squeezing in a field trip anywhere in between was just getting too much.

But Nedzu insisted that it was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Somehow, HPSC and UA had been in negotiations with Port Mafia. One side wanted more information about the city that sanctioned itself off while the other...Aizawa couldn't think of a single good reason for why Port Mafia agreed. No matter how he tried to find a reason, his mind always ended up with the most sinister possibilities.

It was never a good thing to catch a villain's interest.

This year, his class seemed to be a magnet for trouble. With the League still on the loose, Aizawa didn't think they could factor out the possibility of Port Mafia working with Shigaraki. Maybe this field trip was a trap. Yokohama had very specifically and adamantly warned them that All Might couldn't be included in this trip.

While HPSC promised they would have other pro heroes on standby in case anything *did* happen, Aizawa was still skeptical.

What good was backup if they came *after* something terrible happened to his students? This was a risk that no pro heroes with under five years of experience should undertake, let alone teenagers.

Class 1-A already had a streak of unfortunate events. From facing villains who were aiming to maim them to witnessing their teachers getting beaten up by modified monsters, some of them even ran into a serial killer while a city was being reduced to wreckage. In Aizawa's opinion, that was enough horror for the hero hopefuls. They didn't need to see Yokohama's brand of criminals that even veteran heroes barely had an understanding of.

Being an underground hero, Aizawa had heard...stories. Stories from and about Yokohama that would make most thrillers or serial killer documentaries seem like fairy tales in

comparison. Yokohama was a land where people vanished. All the bad and horrible and unexplainable could be found in this city. Horrendous crimes done by heartless criminals, there was no bar too low that these animals wouldn't trash into the dirt. Human life was insignificant in Yokohama, a mere digit in statistics.

Even experienced heroes like himself couldn't claim to be unaffected by the work they did. He didn't want to subject teenagers to the worst of humanity.

But ultimately, the decision wasn't Aizawa's to make.

As much as Yokohama appeared normal, Aizawa could feel eyes on them the second they entered this city. The surveillance came from two sides—with ADA watching them under the friendly guise of being guides while others observed from the shadows. Vlad King knew it too. They were alone and responsible for a large group of children in enemy territory. Neither of them could relax.

He would admit Yokohama's streets appeared quieter though. It felt almost rural, where the tempo of the atmosphere was slower despite how large Yokohama was. On a city's scale, the original land that was rented out during peace treaties was already large. Then the criminals started expanding or that additional territories were assigned or sold throughout history. All of that made Yokohama what it was today.

There was a great interest for the Japanese government to claim back all this land. They appeared to be one united nation formally but everybody knew Yokohama's government and military were basically their own sovereignties. They were self-sufficient even.

It was Aizawa's job to gain as much intel about Yokohama's operations as he could. Besides watching the kids of course. The students were his priority but if he could gather enough information, UA would have a better standing point of squaring up with HPSC in future politics.

The president of ADA was a stern-looking man named Fukuzawa. He wore traditional Japanese clothing and the katana at his side was a rare sight on the outside world. Usually people kept those for decoration purposes or as a symbol of family history. Even those who practiced kendo since young rarely held a real sword since their tournaments weren't decided by death. Aizawa had seen some other pro heroes carry one before, mostly to enhance their quirks. Most of them tried to avoid having such large weapons. It wasn't useful in a crowd and might scare the public more than to deter the villains.

But not Fukuzawa. From the one handshake they shared when they first met, Aizawa could feel how rough the man's hand was. Those were a pair of hands of somebody who worked with metal blades all their life, pouring blood and sweat into perfecting swordsmanship.

The soldier at Yokohama's entrance also had a sword. Maybe without the evolution of quirks, this was how Yokohama locals made up for the disadvantage.

"I need an explanation about what happened this afternoon," Aizawa told Fukuzawa in the detective's office. Vlad settled down beside him, staring intensely at the silver haired man.

Fukuzawa placed his hands on the desk, meeting both heroes' gazes stoically. "I thought we were in agreement that during your stay, my agency will decide what is best suited for your classes."

"They faced a potential hostage situation."

"It was an illusion created by my employee, Tanizaki." Fukuzawa didn't even frown. "While we have been getting a surge of robberies from small-time criminals hoping to get out of Yokohama, your students weren't in any actual danger."

"Couldn't you have introduced your abilities verbally in a normal manner? What could they possibly learn from thinking they were almost robbed?" Vlad hissed angrily.

"For one, self-control." The man shook his head, mentioning for Vlad to keep calm. "They were told to not use their quirks under any circumstances."

"It feels more like you're setting them up," Aizawa pointed out coldly. The students were young. They didn't have much fighting experience yet, let alone battling experience relying on physical powers alone. Also, a quirk was part of somebody. It was one thing to ask them to refrain from using their quirks but another to restrict the use completely. This was basically the equivalent of asking someone to open a door without their hands then setting the room on fire.

Every sane person would use their hands to open the door and run when faced with an emergency.

It was only natural. An instinct.

Fukuzawa only glanced between the two heroes. "I'm sorry if you feel that way but this is a very controlled method of exposing them to Yokohama's dark side already. If they can't even handle this, I would suggest you contact your principal and withdraw from this field trip."

For some reason, although the man's tone remained flat, he appeared quite eager to kick them all out.

If the pro heroes stormed out now, they would have done exactly what Fukuzawa wanted. Aizawa silently centered his anger.

There was no use arguing. While he hated it, they weren't just here on a field trip. The kids might not be Aizawa's first choice of candidates but they were here with a diplomatic goal. It would reflect poorly on the hero society as a whole if they couldn't even last two days in Yokohama. The future heroes that lasted through a villain attack, the high achievers who enrolled into the most prestigious school in the country...and they ran away from Yokohama?

It was a reasonable choice.

But it would also be a cowardly one. The criminals of Yokohama were already so bold and proud of what they could do. For the first time in a very long time in both of their histories,

this would be the first encounter many would have with heroes. For all of the heroes to leave right now would essentially be the same as fleeing with their tails between their legs.

The criminals didn't even have to utter a single threat or put up a fight. They would think the outside world was theirs to take.

Not to mention all the media backlash the kids would face if word of this field trip ever got out. Instead of debuting as professionals with bright careers ahead, they would be known as the kids whose inexperience smeared the heroes' image.

Not strong enough.

Not mature enough.

Stupid kids who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. It wasn't fair but they would be blamed if anything was to happen.

Aizawa was starting to see less and less benefits of this whole Yokohama fiasco.

"If we're done here, excuse me for I have another meeting to get to." Fukuzawa stood up, his hands hidden under the wide sleeve of his green yukata. He didn't say anything else as he moved past the other men.

And there was nothing the heroes could do about it.

2

Their first case with the detectives was to investigate a suspicious suicide.

A man had rained down from the roof of an office building. The bystanders and nearby shop owners called emergency services then the cops and EMT pulled up. They pronounced the man dead on scene before the investigation began.

Midoriya and plenty of his peers found the splatter of brains and blood on the side of the road disturbing. They weren't allowed to touch the corpse in fear of contamination but they were allowed to watch the detectives approach the body covered under a white sheet. Pictures of the victim's wounds were then presented to them along with witness testimonies.

It had been a simple case. The man's brother slipped him a little bit of drugs in a bottle of wine and it was a slippery roof. Tanizaki and Atsushi deduced the murder and the police made the arrest.

In place of heroes, the police took care of the crime. It was detectives piecing together clues to find rapists and special combat officers raiding meth houses. No heroes were needed. Not even quirks were required in most cases.

Midoriya couldn't help but be in awe at how the officers—blood and flesh—ran towards danger. They had bulletproof vests, not skin that could turn to steel. They made up for speed with teamwork instead of relying on quick feet that could go as fast as cars. Ropes, batons, shields...they were normal people protecting society with what they had.

The quirkless weren't useless.

Maybe they couldn't fly or levitate mops, maybe none of them could ever make flowers bloom upon command, but they were happy and living their best. These people weren't monsters or helpless citizens like the rumors on the outside told of. They had their struggles and their stories but also their happiness and their families.

He wondered if he didn't meet All Might, maybe this would have been his life; A police officer or even just a tech guy behind one of the computers down at the precinct.

The two classes followed the detectives to work. They were learning to solve crimes that already happened. Not every hero would make it on time every time to stop a crime that was happening. Sometimes the culprit wouldn't be as obvious as a robber in a ski mask either. Shadowing the detectives gave them a chance to understand how to logically find evidence and deduce the villain.

There were clues in shoe prints, in the missing dust at the edge of a window, or behind the fidgety fingers of witnesses.

Midoriya didn't see a lot of other people with quirks or abilities. ADA promised no harm would come to them if they followed the rules and didn't stray from the group. So far, everything has been fine too. They were even starting to enjoy themselves in Yokohama.

Since they weren't undergoing vigorous training, Midoriya had time to theorize what kind of abilities the detectives have. ADA didn't tell them about their powers, saying that the kids will know if something was to happen. They were strangely secretive about their powers when they were willing to talk about Yokohama's history.

It probably made sense. While most heroes had their quirks publicized, in some situations it was still better to have the element of surprise.

Midoriya took the initiative to try to put the deducing skills they were learning from ADA to use.

Atsushi probably has a very physical power, something that enhanced his speed and strength. He had sharpened senses too, even if he sometimes was a little awkward or clumsy. Dr. Yosano...maybe a healing related power like Recovery Girl? The other detectives said as long as they still had a breath, Dr. Yosano could save them. He wasn't sure if her powers can work on All Might. Healing quirks were rare and he wondered if she could help All Might... no, he should check with All Might first.

Before they left for Yokohama, All Might came to talk to him in private.

"Young Midoriya, don't believe anybody in Yokohama."

The No.1 hero shook his head and in a solemn voice, told Midoriya a piece of his past. Years ago, All Might infiltrated Yokohama. It was his first and final time in the city of sins.

All Might and the other older heroes were chasing a lead to All For One. One of the villain's associates was rumored to have gone into hiding in Yokohama. There were talks about smuggling firearms or other weapons into Japan to aid All For One. While a villain or hero with a strong quirk was certainly more dangerous than a gun, modern weapons still posed a deadly threat to less experienced fighters or the general population.

So All Might was determined to capture this associate and that was when his nightmare started.

A hero's presence wasn't a welcomed one in Yokohama, let alone the symbol of peace in the flesh. It was supposed to be a stealth mission, one where All Might would be in and out of the city in one night before Port Mafia could catch on. They had intel that the villain was hiding in an abandoned warehouse close to the city's edge. All Might was about to descend upon the villain and his goons when he noticed there was a child who was amongst the criminals. The villain mentioned how the child would be a great gift to All For One.

Naturally, All Might attacked to save the child. But Port Mafia arrived then and they were after the kid too. As more armed men entered the warehouse, the battlefield became one of chaos.

It was already too late when All Might realized something was wrong.

At one point, All For One appeared and the two nemesis were engaged in battle. Fists pounded into flesh while the air pressure from their kicks destroyed the warehouse. Lasers and bullets were fired and each smash of All Might's attack cracked more earth and concrete. He almost had All For One. Almost.

If only All For One was really there.

It was all inside his head. His opponent was never All For One, it was the Port Mafia and the villains. All Might had killed All For One's associate and injured many others. It was as if madness had captured everybody and men were dragging their battered bodies across the field, trying to kill each other. Some didn't know pain, others stabbed blades into their own stomachs, many were biting into each other's limbs.

An apocalypse.

There was no other way to describe it. All For One's evil always had a goal but the violence All Might witnessed that day had none. People attacked everything alive around them without regard for any sort of fear or purpose. They all had a wild look behind their eyes, desperate to spill more blood even as they cried in terror. Fire engulfed the building All Might shattered. Smoke spilled over wilted grass while more of Port Mafia's members rushed towards the scene.

All Might didn't know what happened after. He just knew that the one who brought hell on earth was the very child he was trying to save.

That kid was laughing as people burned alive.

“They would be around middle school age or slightly younger by now,” All Might said. “It was too dark to tell what they looked like in detail and they didn’t speak but they had a cursed doll with them.”

Midoriya shuddered at remembering his mentor’s warning. It sounded like a mind-controlling ability. All Might had to pull out of Yokohama as soon as he could as more of the locals arrived. He couldn’t be around people either, in fear of getting controlled again.

The No.1 hero leveling Yokohama would be a disaster and a full declaration of war. All Might couldn’t stick around to tangle in the politics with Port Mafia either. After that, All Might was forbidden to ever return to Yokohama. There were probably other details but the man didn’t share those with Midoriya. Still, it was enough to make the teen’s heart plummet to his feet.

How could a *child* be that cruel and unbothered by death?

The kid All Might described couldn’t have been more than five years old, maybe even younger. At the age when Midoriya and his peers were trying to collect rare hero cards, this ability user was causing mass hysteria? It was nearly incomprehensible.

But it was All Might. All Might would never lie to him about such a serious topic.

“Midoriya! Hurry up, we’re eating dinner outside today.”

“Ah! I’m coming!”

In a hurry, Midoriya packed his notebook and pencil case into his bag before running out of the hotel room he shared with Todoroki to join the rest of the class.

Atsushi and Mr. Kunikida took them to a Korean BBQ restaurant. It didn’t look anything special but they had some really great selection of spices that Midoriya knew Kacchan would love. However, Katsuki wasn’t eating much tonight. Maybe it was because they witnessed a real body? While the death wasn’t one of horrid violence, it was still pretty gorey.

The blond boy had been surprisingly tame for the trip even if Midoriya could feel a layer of agitation stewing underneath his silence.

Katsuki had been suppressing his temper ever since they entered Yokohama because Aizawa specifically called the trouble magnets in class out. Again. Yelling profanities, uttering threats, or mouthing off people weren’t allowed. They were outsiders and Yokohama didn’t play by the same rules of law as the rest of Japan (or the world for that matter). The teachers and ADA also feared that the students might anger the wrong people.

Kacchan might look like a delinquent and he could be awful but he adhered to the rules most of the time. Or rather, Aizawa-sensei very specifically said anybody who broke the rules on this field trip would be met with harsh punishments and calls to the guardians. Things have been tense between Kacchan’s parents and him lately too from the phone calls Midoriya heard between his mom and Aunt Mitsuki. Maybe the blond just wanted to avoid more trouble.

Either way, it was good that Katsuki was behaving. It meant that Midoriya could focus on things other than reining in his troublesome and hot-tempered childhood friend. For one, he found it a bit odd that Atsushi had been hanging around him and Katsuki the most.

The difference was subtle. Atsushi still mingled with the other UA students but he was always either one step behind Midoriya or within arm range of Katsuki as much as he could. This was especially obvious when their teachers weren't around. The two adults were given the chance to talk to Yokohama police about some more professional stuff in private, accompanied by another detective of course. Usually Dazai went with them to the police station.

"Midoriya," Yaoyorozu whispered next to him. Her movement caused Uraraka, who was sitting on Midoriya's other side to glance over too. "Have you noticed..."

She glanced at Atsushi, who was seated behind Katsuki's group that was a few tables away from them.

"He's hanging around me or Kacchan a lot," Midoriya added for her. "Yeah, I noticed that. Kacchan probably knows too."

The girl sighed, looking slightly worried. "I think they've flagged you two and Todoroki as the troublemakers. Mr. Kunikida has been glaring at Mineta almost every time he is with us too."

"Deku-kun hasn't done anything wrong. Neither has Todoroki or Bakugou." Uraraka picked at the noodles on her plate with a frown. "They are being very careful and doing their job but it feels very...ugh, it's hard to describe."

"Patronizing," suggested Iida.

It felt as if the detectives were treating them all like children or rabid dogs that needed to be on leashes. The logical part of them knew this was a natural response by the detectives. They were just looking out for them, not wanting any of them to run off or make rude comments that might get them in trouble. However, the constant reminder of how they had no idea what they were doing was almost suffocating.

Besides the verbal warning that Mr. Kunikida gave them at the start of the field trip, the other reminders were more subtle. Yet, the undertone of mistrust and suspicion was still there. Instead of like the civilians on the outside, the people of Yokohama don't look at a bunch of UA students with awe or curiosity. Here, there was an exasperation or apprehension behind the looks people give them. They weren't used to seeing people who weren't like them. The difference in skin color and body sizes startled a few bystanders or shop owners when they were walking around the city.

No one actually said anything mean or horrible.

But they could all feel the thin layer of hostility.

They weren't welcome in Yokohama.

When they finished dinner, Mr. Kunikida was staying behind to pay while Atsushi got a call from the agency as the rest of them were on the way back to the hotel. One of their colleagues—Kenji—was nearby and needed some help.

“I’ll be right back,” Atsushi said. He looked down the road, where the hotel stood just two traffic lights away. It was a straight path down to the hotel and barely a five minute walk. “You guys go straight to the hotel, no detours and no distractions, okay? Just keep walking and Kunikida-san will be with you all shortly.”

Both Class 1-A and 1-B agreed.

It was such a short walk and they could literally see their destination. There was no way anybody would get lost for this short of a distance. Atsushi ran off, disappearing across the street as the buses and cars sped by.

And that was when they spotted a little girl alone under the streetlamp. She was wearing a private elementary school’s uniform with a sailor collar and gray skirt. With a red backpack at her feet, she was staring at the busy road and sniffing.

People just kept walking past her as if she didn’t exist.

The girl pushed her ponytail back as she kneeled down, shoulders trembling slightly while more adults walked past her. None spared her any attention. The bow on her head quivered as her crying got louder.

“Are you okay?” Shiozaki approached the girl. The teen’s thorny green hair must have startled the child because she took a small step back. However, she didn’t scream or run away in fear.

“I-I can’t find my mommy...” she sobbed.

Asui knelt down to get to eye level with her. “Oh no, you poor thing. Where did you last see her?”

She shook her head.

“Do you know your mom’s phone number?”

“Tsuyu-chan, our phones don’t work...” Jiro reminded her.

The frog girl made a small noise of realization. None of them had gotten used to the fact that their phones were basically an emergency radio now. Even the internet or data on their phones didn’t work so they couldn’t check any social media or contacts either.

“It’s okay, we can wait here with her then.” Midoriya craned his neck, trying to see if there was a woman looking for her kid in the crowd.

“Hey Monoma, there’re too many of us idling that we’re blocking the road. Should some of us head back first? In case the teachers are already waiting for us?” asked Awase, who was standing closer to the crossroad and the traffic light was about to change. “Or a few of us can

fan out a bit to look for her mom? We won't go far, just around the businesses here so we are still all within ear range."

Monoma was going to agree when Iida cut in, "We're told to stay together as a group."

"And we really should get back to the hotel," Shoji muttered. "It's almost curfew. Aizawa-sensei is going to have our heads if we're late."

"We can't just leave her here alone."

People were talking over each other, trying to figure out what to do and Shiozaki started praying.

Kendo came over, keeping a bit of distance from the girl so that they weren't all crowding around her. "Do you know where you last saw your mom?"

"She went that way." The girl looked down the road, opposite of the hotel and connecting to a quiet corner where few businesses still had their lights on.

"I guess some of us can try to look for her?" suggested Kaminari as he squinted, trying to see if there was any movement down the road. "There're so many of us, if a bunch of us stay together, it should be okay as long as we all can still see each other?"

The others mumbled their agreements. It was only about a block's radius, they should be okay.

But then Katsuki asked in a rough voice, "Hey kid, do you know where you live?"

"Ov-ver there."

The girl pointed a shaky finger between two buildings, where a narrow road led away from the busy streets. It looked like it was a residential or office area. Beyond the first building, it was nearly pitch dark. She ducked behind Uraraka as Katsuki's sharp red eyes landed on her, shivering slightly behind the older girl.

"I-It's not far. Just the house with the red roof but it's dark and scary...and Mommy told me to wait for her." The girl picked up her backpack, casting her gaze to the ground as she tried to stop herself from crying. "I'm hungry and tired."

"Why don't we walk her down there?" Todoroki proposed. The house with the red roof wasn't far from the mainroad. Even if they went there, they could still see the hotel and it would only take them a few extra minutes.

Midoriya was about to voice his agreement along with the others when Katsuki kicked Todoroki's calf. He didn't manage to land a hit because Todoroki moved away just in the nick of time but the blond still growled.

"Bakugou, what are you doing?" Iida chided. "No attacking your classmates."

“Oh, piss off, Four Eyes.” Katsuki rolled his eyes, glaring at the class president with a bemused look. “Half-and-Half is dumb and you’re dumber. Are you really going to tell me you see nothing wrong here? What kind of mom leaves her kid alone in the streets at night in *Yokohama*? Do you really think it’s a brilliant idea to go down a dark alley with not a single fucking functional light?”

When he put it that way, there was something shady. But the girl was so young. Kids can be afraid of the dark. Not all parents were careful with their kids too. What if something happened to the mom? Maybe that was why she had to leave her daughter behind?

“There are forty-one of us here.”

“It doesn’t mean shit. No quirks, remember?”

Realistically, it would be very difficult to try to kidnap such a large group simultaneously. Even if there were ability users or villains in *Yokohama*, surely none of them would try to take on such a large target in the open streets. There was no way anybody could subdue all of them so quickly. Even without their quirks, they could still run.

“Bakugou, maybe don’t talk with such a strong vocabulary.” Kirishima set a hand on the blond teen’s shoulder. “There’s a kid here. And why are you getting so worked up? She’s just a kid.”

“Cause that road is *dark and scary*,” Katsuki mocked as he spared Kirishima a glance of annoyance, “and she doesn’t make a lick of sense. Call the cops for her if you really want to wait for her mom.”

“But Mommy said we shouldn’t trouble the—” the girl started but Katsuki interrupted her rudely as he started walking towards the hotel.

“There’s a police post just next to the hotel. Bring her there then.” He didn’t look back. “Come on kid, start walking.”

Monoma shared a look with the Class B students. Some of them decided to follow Bakugou as did the Class A kids who were standing further away.

“I guess Bakugou is right...” Asui blinked, watching Katsuki leave before tugging on Iida’s sleeve. “He didn’t have to be that harsh about it though...”

Midoriya turned to comfort the girl, only, she wasn’t there anymore.

“Where did she go?” he exclaimed out loud.

Uraraka spun around, also shocked alongside Todoroki. “She was just behind us!”

“Hey! Where are you going?” Iida yelled and they saw the little girl dashing past him, running towards the dark alley without hesitation. “It’s dangerous to go off—”

There was a short and muffled rumbling noise as the engines in his legs started up but then the teen’s feet were off the ground.

“No, no. It’s dangerous to run off on your own. Stay in a group, remember?” the voice behind Iida said. The male’s voice was young and cheerful.

The students all stopped dead in their tracks as they stared at what was happening. There was a boy—a middle schooler most likely—who lifted Iida up in the air. He had short blond hair and was at least half a head shorter than Iida. However, he held the older teen up as easily as one would haul a stray dog. With his hands under Iida’s armpits, he moved the hero student around as if presenting Simba for the crowd.

“W-wait! Who are you? Put me down!” Iida’s face was red as he was twirled and placed back on the ground, securely planted amongst his friends.

The little girl was long gone.

Large gold eyes peeked out from behind Iida. “Hello! I’m Kenji from ADA!” the boy greeted. He was wearing a simple blue overall and a plain white shirt. There was a straw hat dangling around his neck. Also, he had plenty of freckles on his sun-kissed skin. “It’s dangerous to be wandering off alone so late. President Fukuzawa said to keep you all in a group so I can’t let you run off.”

Mr. Kunikida and Atsushi also arrived. Mr. Kunikida had a bit of soot on his face, which was strange...were they caught up in a scuffle or fight? Maybe the man went to help Kenji and Atsushi.

Atsushi was a bit out of breath as he bent forward beside Kenji. “Next time, don’t throw me—oh, why are you kids still out here?”

Mr. Kunikida checked his watch. “It’s almost your curfew. It shouldn’t have taken you this long to get to the hotel.”

Midoriya and his friends gulped quietly as they studied the look on the man’s face. They knew that look on an adult very well. It was a warning that they were about to get lectured heavily.

It felt like their fault.

They were told it was their fault.

Everybody was getting an earful from Mr. Kunikida as soon as they got back to the hotel. Their teachers were also informed of their “highly risky” behavior.

The man’s scolding was an infinite loop of the same cold logic. There was no reasoning with how Yokohama locals operated. He blamed them for almost getting in trouble. Kirishima and a few others like Midoriya were frustrated trying to argue that they were just trying to help since no one else would.

Why were they in the wrong for wanting to give a helping hand?

How could society operate if no one could trust another? Maybe there weren’t any pro heroes in Yokohama but not all heroes needed a cape or shining license. Maybe some just needed a

bit more kindness.

“Deku, shut up,” Kacchan barked from behind the green-haired teen. “No use arguing with him.”

It wasn't arguing. They were just trying to make sense of things. Why was trying to help someone else considered “dangerous and reckless”? Why did the girl run off? Even if she had ill intentions, she couldn't have been the mastermind behind whatever crime was possibly going to happen. Shouldn't someone go stop her? Help her?

Also...

“If the streets are so dangerous at night, why can he walk around freely then?” Todoroki pointed to Kenji, who sat on the sofa quietly with a large smile on his face. There was something strange about this kid. He was constantly smiling and there seemed to be more air in his head than actual substance because talking to him was a chore. He answered in vague farm talk, referencing barns and animals instead of giving straight answers.

“Because I'm the shepherd who needs to keep the cow herd together. At least, that's what Dazai-san said.” Kenji tilted his head, beaming at Todoroki. “And the streets aren't dangerous. Everybody's very nice!”

“Then why can't we be out alone?”

“Because it's dangerous.”

“You just said it isn't.”

“It isn't.”

“You're not making sense!” Mina protested.

“Alright, that's enough!” The order from Aizawa-sensei made the room fall into silence. “It's late, go clean up and go to bed. I don't want to hear another argument about this. We're in Yokohama and we will adhere to the local's rules. Am I understood?”

The rest of them knew they didn't have an option but to agree so begrudgingly, they answered, “Yes, sensei.”

Honestly, Yokohama was just getting more and more confusing.

“How is hosting the UA students going?” Ranpo twirled around in his chair, laughing when he heard Atsushi groaned.

The pale-haired teen buried his face in his hands. “It's tiring. They're very curious about everything and it's like all of them want to run towards different directions all at once.”

He was finding new respect for dog walkers and kindergarten teachers. There was no way he could do this every day as a profession. It was so hard to keep track of all the kids and they

were talking over each other, Atsushi had no idea what he should do or say.

“I feel like something weird is going on with that Bakugou boy.” Kunikida offered Atsushi tea. It was already late but they still had to finish up some paperwork for the cases they worked on. Hosting UA students didn’t mean the agency suspended their other jobs. “Is he supposed to be naturally suspicious? Or did he just watch a lot of true crime TV? Not that I’m complaining...it’s good to see at least one kid from the outside still has some brains.”

“Most of the other kids aren’t so bad. They have a high sense of justice and they are kind to others. It’s just that they’re easily swayed by the opinions of their peers.” The pen in Tanizaki’s hand flew across the page as he scribbled on the edge of draft paper. “As for Bakugou...he came in first for UA’s entrance exam for his year. There has to be some merit behind that achievement. Can we get the paperwork done faster? Naomi is waiting for me at home.”

Tanizaki’s sister hasn’t been around the agency often lately. Mostly because while technically also a member of ADA, the girl was still a student and she was more of an administrative assistant. The outsiders can be unpredictable so President Fukuzawa didn’t want the non-combative members to be around them too much.

Also, Naomi had a...slight intimacy issue when she was near her brother.

They really didn’t need the UA kids to be witnessing any of that or asking questions about it. Those were minors for god’s sake!

“I’d say it’s more than that.” Ranpo stood up, playing with a pair of glasses as he waltzed over to check on Atsushi’s paperwork. After he pushed his own workload to Kunikida of course. Ignoring the man’s protest, he plopped himself down in the seat next to Atsushi. “That’s the second time he stopped his classmates from doing what they normally would do.”

“Second?” repeated Atsushi. Confused, he turned towards Kunikida and Tanizaki, who shook their heads too.

Smiling, Ranpo pointed below them. “At the cafe, he tripped his classmate to stop the other guy from jumping into action. It’s simple to deduce from the seating arrangement and what you said in your report. With the reaction speed he showed in the Sports Festival, he could have done something but he didn’t. Not even a pop of boom from friction. People are creatures of habit, if he’s used to sparking off in a daily setting, there’s no way some stern warning can suppress that completely.”

“He did have a classmate fall on him.” It might hurt the other guy.

“A classmate who can harden his skin to withstand close range blasts in combat, which Bakugou knows. He didn’t spark off because his body already anticipated what was happening next.”

Tanizaki yawned, reaching for another cup of coffee while looking up at his colleagues. “So he’s careful and stops his classmates from acting rash, that’s not a bad thing for us. Sure, it’s a little strange—”

“You think he knows who Lucy is? Lucy didn’t recognize him, she hadn’t even watched the Sports Festival videos before,” Kunikida interjected in a more serious tone as he directed the question to Ranpo. A careful kid was good news but an outsider who knew more than he should was a whole different story. “Or maybe he wants to check out what Atsushi can do?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. There’s too little information to tell for certain right now. I also wasn’t there to witness him when the things happened so all of this is only a speculation.” It wouldn’t be far-fetched if UA wanted to find out what kinds of abilities there were in the agency. Maybe like the arrogant kid he was, Bakugou just wanted to chill and get a feel of how Atsushi would react in dangerous situations. “I can tell that he’s kind of depressed and on edge though. It shows here.” Ranpo pointed to between his own eyebrows. “And he’s constantly thinking but he’s not analyzing us like that Midoriya kid who is trying to figure out our abilities. What is Bakugou thinking about? That I need Atsushi to figure it out.”

Atsushi grimaced, thinking about the loud-mouthed blond teen with a bit of anxiety. He didn’t do well with people who were rough or snappy. It reminded him of the bad kids in the orphanage that he grew up in. “How am I going to do that?”

“Easy,” Ranpo whistled while lifting a finger, “try asking him about love.”

"...Eh?"

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to try and tie some canon BSD plot together so it makes (kind of) sense in this AU too.

Also, excuse my screaming but Zeku's dad is showing up in the canon manga and god damn, his dad is hot too. (*`V`*)

Anyways, hope you liked this chapter. Also, let me know if there's a MHA character's POV that you'd like to see. Thanks!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1

Atsushi very firmly believed that deactivating a bomb would be easier than his current task. He wasn't a very chatty person to begin with. How was he supposed to casually bring up the topic of romance to a bunch of strangers? It didn't matter that they were close to his age or making small talk was an important skill a detective should have.

Atsushi couldn't do it.

Logically, he knew talking to another teen was easier than jumping from a flying warship or fighting the mafia. However, when he was in battle, at least the goal was clear. When people attacked, he needed to survive. When they tried to kill, he needed to protect. Throwing a punch? He could certainly do that. Running away? Yep, no problem at all.

But he had no idea what constituted romance. Where would he even start to figure that out?

Growing up in an orphanage, all the adults ever did was scold or beat him. The other kids tore him down too, taking his stuff and forcing him to do their portion of chores. They knew the adults didn't like Atsushi. It didn't matter if there was a reason or not. They understood that the people in power didn't like Atsushi so none wanted to be associated with him. His life had been a pretty isolating one, where he stayed

Friendship and kindness were hard to come by. The only thing he knew about romance came from posters and the whispers between other people. The staff sometimes gossiped about their neighbors. The IT company manager was having an affair. The housewife who constantly fights with her husband over picking up dirty socks. Sometimes relationships bloomed amongst the kids but those usually didn't last. Either they got discovered and one kid would get sent away or because their own personal demons ruined it all first.

Atsushi knew next to nothing about love. He couldn't just go up to Bakugou and ask what the blond's type was or suggest having a heart to heart when they barely knew each other.

He'd sound like a pervert!

The method of approaching people differed. Atsushi wasn't the playboy type or much of a conversation starter who could just waltz over to anybody and talk about a range of topics on a whim. He couldn't manipulate conversations like Dazai or glimpse inferences from basic interactions like Ranpo. If it was Kenji, the other boy would just ask the question bluntly but Kenji had his special charm (and sturdy body that can take a punch to the face). The same question had different connotations when asked by the other gender too.

Atsushi was on his own. When he didn't know what to do, Yosano recommended he understand his target first. Bakugou Katsuki was a proud kid with a nasty vocabulary. A hero-in-training. What else? A bunch of people had an opinion about it online. Yokohama didn't restrict access to outside information, it was the other way around that they limited. The citizens still could stream outside media. With the strong focus on quirks in the outside world, not a lot of people—mostly quirkless—born in Yokohama had a desire to leave the city. While Yokohama wasn't a paradise, it was the one place in Japan where quirkless discrimination was non-existent. For most of those born and raised in Yokohama, it was better to live here than to take their chances outside. Nobody wanted to be powerless and caught between a battle between heroes and villains...or rather, no one wanted to stick out in a crowd. When everybody else had wings or fangs or extra ears, it was hard to be plain.

Atsushi had a few social media accounts too upon Dazai's recommendation when he first joined the agency. They don't have to post anything or be on it daily but they were sources of information. As part of the ADA, they needed to beware of what was going on in the outside world in case there were threats to Yokohama, whether that was from government policy changes or rampaging villains.

Now Atsushi was using it to research Bakugou Katsuki. The UA students already made the news multiple times this year. Not to mention, with All Might becoming a staff at UA, the classes he was teaching got a lot of attention too. From what Atsushi could gather, Bakugou's parents had a successful and blooming business. They lived in a good neighborhood with a low crime rate. The blond teen grew up happy and he was always the type that could command a room. A strong quirk and an even stronger personality, there was an arrogance to him that was expected from kids with such a shiny outlook on life.

"Atsushi, what's wrong?" Kyoka's voice sounded beside him. The younger girl who had been posing as a hotel staff was in her usual red kimono this morning. Her white hair band was pushed up higher to keep her bangs back while she ate. They were having breakfast together in the staff dorms that the two of them shared. "You're on your phone a lot. Is there a new case? Or did Dazai get stuck in a metal barrel again?"

The man had tried to kill himself with a very strange method of suffocation but then gave up and asked for help. It wasn't that the method wasn't working but more because it wasn't beautiful enough of a way to go. And it was "boring", according to Dazai.

"I hope not." Atsushi told her what he was doing and the task Ranpo gave him.

"He sounds very normal. Like all the other outsiders."

Just a regular teenager with his rebellious phase. Loud and prideful, a gifted genius with a wonderful upbringing. He liked winning, he liked being right, he had friends who shared the same dream as him. It was a different life than what Kyoka and Atsushi knew of but it didn't sound like a bad one.

"Yeah...I guess. It's just that I also found these when I was looking through everything." He turned his phone around to show her. It was a series of posts and replies on different sites where people talked about Bakugou.

Tororoboko@jje_3r8: What the beep is wrong with that Bakugou kid? Getting chaine up on a podium is pretty crazy.

hei1lon@west_hell43: LOlll. If he can't handle himself then it seems fitting to chain the dogs up.

Basketballruler@ballers69: That temper should get checked. UA lets anybody in these days.

hghosty7vibe@Hawksbiiggestfan: My friend's cousin's sister went to Aldera with Bakugou. Man was a bitch y'all. Always had a haughtier-than-thou attitude. He blows a fuse whenever people try to get close or couldn't get his way. Everybody saw it but were too scared to say anything. Not surprise he made it in UA. They love their firepower flashy quirks.

Greenywitchy@bangbangmagesty0: It's scary that he keeps yelling "DIE" all the time.

#Quirkdiscrimination

The messages continued on and only spiraled worse. While there were people arguing that chaining up kids was an overreaction, the language both sides used was abhorrent. There were notes about appearances and sexual or violent fantasies, jokes that bordered along the lines of criminal intent, and other vile messages about abuse. Claims of favoritism, violent tendencies, observations of ill behavior, and all the talks of what was problematic in hero society and Bakugou himself.

"This is very..." Kyoka sank into silence. While both Atsushi and her were used to violence or nasty words, seeing it on the internet felt different. The anger here seemed to be multiplied as hands typed all the most horrible stuff behind anonymous usernames. They resonated off each other, echoing the same opinion and amplifying the hate. Small issues could be blown out of proportion and the most mundane of action twisted into sickening evidence of crookedness. "I guess that's what happens when you are sort of famous. People will always have something to say about you."

Almost every hero had a scandal, be it real or fabricated. People were braver on the internet too, speaking with no filter because there was rarely any repercussions.

It was a different kind of problem that neither Kyoka or Atsushi had ever faced before. They had dealt with difficult witnesses or malicious criminals but never media storms. It looked like the hero student's backlash was a more controlled and mild one already too, instead of becoming straight up cyberbullying or doxxing.

"The problem I have is that this person they described doesn't sound like the guy we've been watching." The detectives have been watching the UA students and teachers these past few days. While Bakugou certainly was full of character, Atsushi couldn't say he was as bad as what the online comments made him out to be. He could be loud. It was true Bakugou kept a bit of distance from the others but Atsushi would rather deal with a cold shoulder than running after berserker hero kids.

Kyoka started cleaning up the table. Her dark hair swept by the short table's leg as she moved past it to clear the dishes away. "It shows that we can't believe everything on the internet. People aren't everything they seem to be but everything that made their name isn't who they are either."

The girl would certainly know it very well. The Port Mafia made her a killing machine and that had been most people's perception of her before she joined ADA. They didn't care about how young Kyoka was or how her parents died. No one bothered to care what she liked to eat or if she enjoyed being an assassin. Her ability was suited for killing, which was all she needed to be good for and all people cared about.

"What about his classmates? They should know Bakugou better than a bunch of strangers."

Atsushi hummed, struggling to find the right words to describe what he was thinking so he could only shake his head. "They're friends and they obviously spend a lot of time together with school and training. They survived villain attacks together. They are the same age."

Logically, people would think these kids knew each other well.

"But I don't think Bakugou is very open with them either." Pulling out a laptop from the bookshelf on the side, he opened a video that ADA obtained through the local police. It wasn't secured or private information since the outside news had blasted it all over the web a year back. It had been part of the evidence the outside police used to add on to the Sludge villain's sentencing though and remained a part of the criminal files. "This is him in middle school when he was attacked by a villain."

In the video, Bakugou was evading a wave of mud. The teen kicked up against the wall, flipping out of sliding mud as a blast kept the villain at bay. Explosions rocked the street while the sludge rushed down the pavement like a tsunami. There was screaming and the sound of chaos. Glass shattered under the explosion's shock waves while cars were flipped over by the sea of moving green and brown mud. A hero made of wood was carrying two other students in the same uniform as Bakugou away, dodging falling billboards or shop signs.

The fight was now in the open. Bakugou was circled by moving mud while trapped between ruins. A few heroes were on the outside, watching and waiting for an opening to get in or trying to save other people nearby. As the fire spreaded and time dragged on, it didn't look like the heroes could help. They were too busy putting out fires as Bakugou did his best to not get caught by the villain.

"This must be why some thought it was a brawl between villains when the news first broke out. He's on the defense but the destruction is spreading. It's a bad match up of powers." Kyoka leaned in closer, studying the battle. She might not know much about romance either but she had more fighting experience than Atsushi. "The mutant types are hard to fight. An opponent who isn't afraid of being blasted in the face or cut into pieces...Electrocution? No. Probably freezing or burning him to stop him from regrouping would work better."

Atsushi sighed. "We're not trying to kill villains here. It's Bakugou that has me confused. For a kid who supposedly lived a normal life up to this point, he's reacting a bit too fast, don't

you think? Sure, his friends can say he's gifted or a natural or that because he aspired to be a hero, he was training on his own."

"You think there's something more?"

"He moves like he's trained to to expect an attack out of the blue," Atsushi said firmly as he stared at the blond on the screen.

"And that's weird because...? He's into heroics. Most of them probably had some training, just the level might differ. Like Todoroki. His dad's a top professional so he moves better than the others."

"Maybe I'm thinking too much or reading this wrong but his fighting habit changed. People complain about him yelling all the time when he's fighting but he's completely silent here. Not even screaming for the heroes to help."

"That can also be because he doesn't want to appear weak and his life was in actual danger," Kyoka suggested. "Also, he's in Yokohama so he's probably holding himself back. They got a lot of warnings from Kunikida and their teachers. It's also different when fighting in a competition against peers than facing off real villains."

Atsushi knew that. It was normal to panic or be scared when attacked but there was another layer of something very familiar behind Bakugou's eyes. He'd seen it on himself from his time before ADA. Back then, he didn't understand his own ability and he thought he was bad luck. After getting kicked out of the orphanage because he was too old, Atsushi believed destruction followed him whenever he went so he was on the move all the time. Then people started chasing him because of the bounty on his head.

The fear of being hunted. The dread that kicked into survival instinct when the inevitable misfortune finally dropped. The anxiousness that came with knowing there danger on his tail. Atsushi saw a hint of that reflected in Bakugou's features.

"He's scared," Atsushi blurted out. His brows were knitted tightly together as he sank deeper into his thoughts. "But it's not the Sludge that he was afraid of? I can't really describe it. I just feel it."

A hand landed on top of his head, ruffling his hair.

"Kyoka?"

"When I look at Bakugou, I just see a guy with a short fuse and potty mouth. He was defending himself and using his quirk like most outsiders would." The girl pulled her hand back. Her usually emotionless face was softer as a small smile curved at the edge of her mouth. "Maybe this is why Ranpo-san gave you the task. You saw something other people didn't. This is something only you can do."

Atsushi felt his shoulders relaxing. He smiled back, mirroring hers while getting up. They had another day of work ahead of them. Kyoka was going to solve cases with Ranpo while Atsushi and Dazai had the UA group. They were going to the shopping district today so it

shouldn't be an intense trip. There would be plenty of opportunities for Atsushi to strike up a conversation with Bakugou.

He might not be the smartest or strongest but he'd never let his friends down.

2

"I can't believe we are shopping next to the mafia's headquarters."

The UA students lifted their heads, all staring at the giant towers with their polished shine. Unlike regular glass which people could see through if they stepped close, the windows of Port Mafia's buildings were specialized. Tinted black and bullet proof, they had a better facility than most police stations or hero agencies.

And it was heavily guarded, to the point where perhaps getting through an airport would be easier than trying to infiltrate the mafia's base.

Todoroki saw men in black suits walking around. A few of them had a bulge near their waist, a sign that there were guns underneath their blazers. It was difficult to understand how bold these gangsters were compared to the yakuza outside of Yokohama. Instead of avoiding crowded streets or keeping their heads down like rats scurrying in the shadows, these people walked around with obvious confidence.

Todoroki Shouto had heard stories about the place growing up. His father, being the No.2 hero, had connections that expanded to far places. However, whenever Yokohama was mentioned from Endeavor's lips, the city run by villains was never associated with anything good.

They were told to expect ruins and chaos. There was no way society could operate without heroes. Just look at some of the other developing countries around the world! There was unrest and disorder because there weren't any professionals to keep the peace. Besides, why wouldn't the villains run wild and trash everything? There was essentially nothing stopping them.

But Yokohama proved to be different. It was mostly a peaceful place, with smiling crowds busy with their lives and a criminal network that operated underground. Most of the criminals here were shrouded in secrecy and they were different from the villains on the outside. They weren't looking to make a big name of themselves or announce their presences to the world. Crime fighting wasn't just about taking down a bad guy either. Organized crime made everything more intricate and sometimes, even if everybody knew who the villain was, there was nothing anybody could do.

It was frustrating.

"Todoroki, please keep in line with the rest of us." Iida's voice called Todoroki back to reality. They were in a busy commercial district and the class president didn't want anybody to get swept away by the crowds.

Hurrying up, Todoroki squeezed himself between Midoriya and Iida, catching up to the rest of Class A. There wasn't anything that Todoroki particularly wanted to buy or stuff that caught his eyes. For most of his peers, it was harder to shop in Yokohama too. There weren't a lot of stores with clothing that suited their body types. They didn't have the capacity to buy large items either and the books being sold were quite conventional.

But to Todoroki, the normalcy of the city was the most jarring part of this whole field trip.

Even amongst the ones wearing black suits, he didn't notice many people with specialized powers. If he was being honest, the average Yokohama citizen even appeared weaker than most people on the outside. They didn't have metal skin or twistable bodies. It wasn't possible for them to breathe underwater or fly in the sky. These people held normal jobs and had normal lives where martial arts were for health reasons or sports. The police here might have gadgets but the ones on the outside had the standard equipment *in addition to* having quirks.

So why were the heroes and villains so afraid of Yokohama?

Todoroki might not like Endeavor but the man was a pro hero for a reason. He didn't climb to the No.2 position simply because he had an intimidating face. Whenever Endeavor spoke of Yokohama, it was always with spite and begrudgement but what underlined all of that was caution. The hesitancy to touch Yokohama amongst the pro heroes was weird. If these heroes could charge after criminals that could raise seabeds or lift whole towers with one hand, what was stopping them from fighting a few suits with firearms?

Something wasn't adding up.

Todoroki turned to look at Atsushi. The older boy with his pale hair and sheepish smiles looked like he wanted to say something but was anxious about it. He really wasn't good at hiding his emotions. Midoriya said Atsushi might have a strength-enhancing type of power, which Todoroki agreed was a possibility. He also noticed that Atsushi's eyes sometimes changed, turning into a brighter gold while his pupils stretched thin. Maybe his power involved something more animalistic? Like Shishida from Class B with his mane and fangs.

But Atsushi couldn't be the reason why Yokohama was so dangerous. Todoroki didn't know if the detective could be a good marker for how strong most abilities were either. It wasn't like Atsushi actually fought in front of them.

As for Dazai...Todoroki couldn't understand this man.

Most of the time, it was Kunikida or another detective doing the talking. Dazai hung around the back of the group, smiling when he noticed one of the students staring at him. He could ramble on and on about suicide and the one thousand and one creative ways of murdering himself but it felt like he was just trying to make people uncomfortable. The book—*A complete guide to suicide*—he was reading all the time didn't help either. He was obviously a slacker too, running from paperwork constantly and always forgetting his own wallet. His colleagues might yell at him for a bit but Dazai usually got his way.

For the entire time they had been in Yokohama so far, Todoroki hadn't seen Dazai do a single bit of detective work. He was either pissing people off or on his way to commit suicide that he appeared completely useless.

But Todoroki couldn't shake the feeling that something was very wrong with Dazai. He had proof for it too: One, the other detectives had an unexplainable trust in the man. Even if they knew they were being duped, they still followed through with what he said. Second, Todoroki once saw Dazai watching his classmates. It wasn't anything creepy like studying them outside their hotel windows but the emptiness behind the man's dark gaze frightened him.

It felt as if they weren't people in Dazai's eyes, that they were no different from a vase.

They went to get donuts and milkshakes near a small dog park with short scrubs and dogs could run around on the lawn. It was a nice bit of greenery in the middle of the city. Todoroki also noticed that it gave the mafia a very clear view of any movement closing towards them on this side of the road.

He followed his classmates while Class B fanned out a little bit so they weren't all crowding at one place. But they were all still within ear range. Iida, Midoriya, and Uraraka sat on the grass, enjoying the sunshine and cool breeze with sweet treats. Finding a rock behind them, Todoroki also dug into the chocolate donuts that were being passed around.

They were all in regular clothing but each outfitted in a way that better helped them assimilate into the city. For those without obvious mutations like Yaoyorozu or Midoriya, they were just dressed in regular clothing, be it a nice summer dress or plain T-shirts and jeans. Iida had been wearing long pants to cover the engines on his legs while some other kids used hats and scarfs. It wasn't a mandatory request by ADA but they all started doing it on their own when they noticed how much attention they were drawing.

"It feels like we're out at a regular park," Uraraka said quietly as she stared at the direction of the mafia buildings. A criminal's base was right there yet the citizens were walking dogs and feeding pigeons like normal.

"This is a regular park," Iida pointed to the water fountain and public washroom. "A little outdated and hard to use too. Shoji almost got stuck in the stalls."

The facilities were built for people with four slender limbs and lighter weight in mind.

"Trying to turn on the water facets has been a nightmare..." Koda added. His hands were too large and the tiny knobs at the hotel showers must be difficult to use.

"I don't enjoy being gawked at." Tokoyami crossed his arms in front of his chest, trying to push the cap on his head down lower. "There was a kid who thought my head's stuck in a chicken costume. What part of me looks like a chicken?"

"Yeah, people have been whispering some...very offensive stuff." Handing a box of differently flavored donuts to Todoroki, Jiro sat down close to them too. "They're just curious because there's not a lot of people with quirks around but it feels like we're a walking circus show to them."

“Is anybody else finding it strange and uncomfortable how we’re having a picnic right in front of the mafia?” Kaminari shoved himself between Jirou and Uraraka, patting the grass aggressively to emphasize his point. “They can probably see us from that building! They have guns and we’re out in the open just like this?”

“Principal Nedzu said Port Mafia won’t attack us if we stick to the rules,” Midoriya reminded him. “Port Mafia were the ones who granted this field trip in the first place.”

Which only made things even more suspicious.

What could a villainous organization want from them? Why would they even want to have a bunch of hero students in what was supposedly *their* city?

“Things have been normal this far,” said Yaoyorozu. “Nobody attacked us and the ADA detectives are all very nice and polite.”

Polite? Yes. Todoroki would agree. Nice? He had doubts. Especially whenever he looked at Dazai.

“And that’s another weird part.” Midoriya had his head down as he delved into one of his rants. “The detectives and Port Mafia are kind of like enemies, aren’t they? Is it really okay for them to be so close to the mafia’s base? Why would a big organization like Port Mafia ever even sit at a negotiation table with ADA? By numbers alone, they have the upper hand and ADA’s office is very normal. They don’t have a lot of firepower in comparison which—”

“It is quite rude to doubt us right in front of us.”

Dazai’s smiling face came into view. The dark haired man bent down, fanning himself with an oddly familiar notebook.

“Hey! That’s mine!” Midoriya yelled as his hand shot out to snatch it back but Dazai leaned back just before the teen’s finger touched the paper.

“You should keep a better watch of your stuff.” Dazai flipped through notes carelessly, dangling the notebook between two fingers. “Also, it’s not a good idea to be theorizing how to take down the mafia right in front of their doorsteps. They are quite the trigger happy bunch. It’s always shoot first and ask questions later.”

Midoriya’s face flushed red. “I’m not thinking about taking them down.”

The detective laughed as he tossed the notes back to Midoriya. “You’re just writing down the number of their security and drawing simple maps of the entrances for fun then.”

“It’s not actually going to achieve anything. Most of it is just my speculation and...”

Midoriya grew quiet as he met Dazai’s smiling eyes. There was an eerie sense of danger that spiked down Todoroki’s spine too even if the man was still weaponless and standing in a relaxed posture.

“I know that analyzing heroes or villains is a fun pastime or full on job on the outside. It’s all public information and always good to make a buzz on the internet or news, but here? It’s

like tap dancing over a field of landmines with this kind of obvious observation.” Dazai tapped the side of his temple. “Using your brain is good but you have to learn to be discreet and not just have these gears running while in battle. Also, try not to leave physical evidence behind. These papers here contain a lot more than you think you can afford to lose.”

“Why?” asked Todoroki. They were notes and contained information that anybody walking by the park could see. It wasn’t like the mafia’s men were hiding how many guards they had at each door.

“I can’t spoon feed you all the answers. Think for yourself.”

He skipped off, going over to annoy the Class B kids or to admire a tree branch that was good for hanging himself on.

“What was that about?” On the park bench, Kirishima twisted his body around, checking on Midoriya but also trying to hear what Dazai was saying to Kendo from across the lawn.

“I’m not really sure?” Scratching his head, Midoriya stuffed his notes back into his backpack. “I think he mainly doesn’t want me to keep writing in them cause we’re close to the mafia’s base. That’s my bad. I should have known it looked suspicious. I’m not sure about what I can lose though...is the mafia going to attack us over a few scribbles?”

Todoroki didn’t see any men charging out of the building with guns blazing.

“Your handwriting and fingerprints, dumbass,” gruffed Bakugou. He wasn’t looking at any of them as he chomped down on the donut in his hand like he was eating the heads of his mortal enemies. When he noticed most of the other kids were just staring at him blankly, he snarled, “Did none of you ever watch a crime show? Serial killer documentaries? Political drama? So many words to mimic your handwriting on other documents perfectly. Frame your prints at a crime scene. And you’re an outsider taking notes on the criminals. Practically handing an excuse to beat your ass to them on a silver platter. Congratulation on nearly starting a war, you fucking nerd.”

“Aren’t you thinking a little too much, Bakugou?” Hagakure tilted her head, waving her arms around to gesture between Midoriya and the backpack that the green haired teen was holding tightly against his chest. “It can’t be that easy to frame somebody. We’re with Midoriya all the time too so he’d have an alibi.”

To which, Bakugou only shrugged. “Whatever.”

He got up, dusting some stray grass off his pants before stomping away.

“Hey, Bakugou! Where are you going?” yelled Kirishima.

“The washroom!”

“Hang on! I’ll go with you!”

They had to go in pairs because that was one of the rules Aizawa-sensei laid out: Nobody was to be alone at any given moment outside of their hotel rooms.

“Midoriya, are you okay?” Todoroki asked quietly when everybody else returned to finishing their snacks and watching dogs running around.

Midoriya sighed heavily. “Um, yeah. It’s just Kacchan. He might be right, you know? This is Yokohama and we can never be too careful. I think I’ll keep my notes locked up in my suitcase when we get back to the hotel.”

He tried to play it off cool but Todoroki could see his friend wasn’t all that calm.

Todoroki never liked Bakugou too much from the start.

The blond reminded him too much of his father. They were two peas in a pod and it was hard to unsee it when the similarities were thrown so blatantly in his face. They both yelled and berated the people around them. Their anger was the same relentless fire that burnt everything in their paths too. While his father was more of a man of action, Bakugou certainly used a heavier vocabulary when it came to insults.

Todoroki wasn’t good at reading social cues but he was observant. It had been trained into him for both his hero career and because of the need to read his father. There were a few tells on people that he knew like the back of his hand.

He could see the fear in Midoriya’s eyes whenever Bakugou raised his voice. Avoiding eye contact, flinching at the sound of explosion, and the nervous hitching breaths were all too familiar to Todoroki. That was him. That was his sister, brother, and mother. They were all like that around Endeavor, afraid that even the smallest of things might set him off. His family toed on a dangerous line, treating everyday tasks as if they were walking on a wire all because of that man. He’d get mad over the stupidest things like Shouto not having the perfect bowtie or that Natsuo was too loud in moving through the hallways. Then the screaming and yelling and beating would come, followed by his mother’s tearful begging.

Midoriya said Bakugou and him were childhood friends, that being aggressive was just Bakugou’s default setting and he meant no harm. Todoroki didn’t have enough experiences with friends to understand if that was what a healthy friendship should look like but the interactions between the two was troublesome. The feeling of bile climbing up his throat whenever he saw Bakugou yell at Midoriya became harder to ignore.

After the sports festival, Midoriya became his friend. Even if they weren’t, Todoroki couldn’t fathom the kind of treatment a classmate would get from Bakugou either.

While Bakugou had always been hard around the edges, the more Todoroki watched him interact with Midoriya, the more red flags appeared. The explosive blond was needlessly cruel with his name calling and he often got physical (or attempted to before somebody stopped him). He kept his distance from the rest, which Todoroki didn’t initially find strange but as time went on, Bakugou was more than an acquired taste. He snapped randomly at people and he was too proud to admit any wrongs. It was a guessing game with horrible odds about what would set him off.

After the Hero Killer encounter, Midoriya started opening up more about his past with the blond to Todoroki and Iida. Todoroki had heard the clipped and strangled sobs when

Midoriya told them about his childhood. How much neglect and abuse he went through because everybody thought he was quirkless.

There was no rivalry between him and Bakugou as most of the class assumed. Midoriya's cheeks had been rubbed raw by angry hands as he tried to stop the tears from pouring and his lips were quivering while he stuttered out the truth. Bakugou was the one who led the torment with his name calling and isolation. When the most popular kid on the playground completely rejected any form of friendship or general benevolence, no one else wanted to be associated with Midoriya either. The adults didn't want trouble. Or rather, they were more concerned with preserving the school's reputation and fawning over a "heroic quirk" than caring about mistreatment another student of less potential were suffering through.

After all, why bother when everybody knew the quirkless were most likely to turn out as failures? Weaker. Stupider. No chance of them being able to outcompete others who were born *naturals*.

It was unfair.

But Midoriya had insisted that everything was getting better. He talked about how Bakugou was learning to be better since they started at UA. How the other kids at his middle school didn't know better. They were just echoing what the adults approved with their silence. Bakugou wasn't like the others. Not all the time. Bakugou was a perfectionist and he only had eyes for the strong but he could be decent when he wanted to. They were friends once and maybe...there was a chance they would be again.

While Todoroki didn't agree, he didn't want to push Midoriya into doing what he was uncomfortable with. Also, they were so busy with training and homework, let alone dealing with villain attacks and this Yokohama field trip. Maybe this wasn't the best time to stir up additional trouble.

Around fifteen minutes later, Dazai told the UA students to follow him. The detectives walked them down to a more artistic neighborhood. These streets had painted murals and smaller shops selling artisan crafts. Jewelry, pottery, paintings...there was a little bit of everything here. Some of these things appeared to be antiques. At least, to the quirked population the furniture and picture frames were styled after the past. The oil paintings featured the old humans, simple even with the vibrant colors. The books had the peculiar scent of ink and aged paper.

And the people?

Well, one man looked particularly disgusted, like he stepped in dog excrete when he walked out of the winery. He was probably about Dazai's age. Piercing gray eyes glared at them between curls of bright orange hair. Pressing the black fedora hat lower, he didn't acknowledge them but continued to give them a look of death. He was dressed professionally with a three piece suit. For a white collar, the man was wearing too many accessories. From the stylish red band around his hat to the silver chain dangling off the brim, it wasn't something normal office workers would select for a day to day. He even had a black choker that was more of a fashion statement than serving a functional purpose.

Maybe he worked in a high end industry that required keeping up with appearances?

Also, for a grown man, he was around the same height as Uraraka.

“Fancy seeing you here,” Dazai hummed as he purposefully stopped in front of the man. The detective’s smile grew wide and Todoroki immediately noticed Atsushi tensing. “Why do you look so gloomy on a sunny day?”

The man rolled his eyes dramatically while holding his newly bought wine closer to his chest. Most of the bottle was obscured in a brown paper bag but the distinctive red and yellow rim of the cork was one that Todoroki recognized. Endeavor had a bottle of it at his agency, one that was quite pricey and saved for celebratory occasions. “It’s always a shit day when you show up. What are you doing here? Did ADA go bankrupt already so that you don’t have cases to solve?”

Anybody could tell there was tension between these two. The man’s free hand twitched as if he was itching to smash Dazai’s face into a brick wall. Dazai was different too, while still acting carefree, his words grew sharper as he met the man’s eyes with confidence.

“I am working. These are the UA students, see?” Dazai gestured towards them. “Bright and shining stars of the next generation! They’re studying hard to reach their dreams but Chuuya probably won’t understand. You didn’t even finish elementary!”

“Outsiders...” the man muttered to himself before very casually (and without warning), kicked Dazai in the knee. His foot nearly made a heavy impact against the taller man’s kneecap but Dazai weaseled his way to safety with a second to spar. “Stick to the agreement and keep the twerps in line.”

“Who is he?” Shinshou asked Atsushi quietly.

The teen detective’s lips quivered with a bit of hesitancy before he sighed, “Nakahara Chuuya. He’s one of Port Mafia’s executives.”

A few short hitches of breath came from the crowd of students. Port Mafia? This guy? He was nicely dressed but they wouldn’t immediately associate this man with criminal activity. Also, what did Atsushi mean by an “executive”? Surely the high ranking mafia members wouldn’t just be out in the streets alone? Buying alcohol and enjoying a quiet afternoon too?

It was almost like...they were regular people too.

All villains had to begin somewhere. They didn’t just pop out of a rock and immediately started casting entire cities into disarray. Nobody was born a menace to society. The hardest concept to grasp was how the criminals could harm others without remorse and then return to those they held dear as if nothing happened.

Todoroki thought of his father. Not all heroes were good people. That was a fact he learned long ago but he rarely thought of the other way around. Were the villains like that? Somehow there was good despite all the evil? Do they return home to kids they cherished? Did they enjoy the little joy in life just like everyone else?

More importantly, it felt weird that there was a real life associate of a criminal organization and they were all standing around doing nothing.

The mafia noticed their stares and he gave them an odd look. It was a look of mistrust and strangely...some empathy?

“There’s an order in place,” Nakahara gruffed, “all of you will be safe as long as you follow the rules.”

“What happens if we don’t?” Todoroki’s question came out as more of a challenge than he intended.

But the Yokohama local didn’t even bat an eye. “Best case scenario is you will get kicked out of this city.”

“And the worst?” It surprised Todoroki a bit when Bakugou spoke up. He overheard Aizawa-sensei talking to Bakugou privately at school before the field trip. The blond had received additional warning about his behavior. Todoroki could see how Bakugou had been holding his tongue. As much as Bakugou despised it, he was keeping his temper in check to the best of his abilities so far.

Nakahara didn’t answer. Or rather, he was too preoccupied with Dazai to answer. Somehow, the two of them had a clash of words over Nakahara’s choice of wine. From the vendor to the year to the way the liquor was brewed, many insults were exchanged and Todoroki understood nearly none of it.

Was this what being an adult was like? These men knew alcohol like the back of their hands.

Dazai shrugged. “It’s not like you even have anybody to share the wine with. No pretty lady likes Chuuya because you can’t be at eye level with them. Not even when you’re both sitting down for a candle-lit dinner. But then again, that wine’s too bitter for romance too.”

“Who are you calling short?” Nakahara yelled angrily. If not for him holding the wine, he probably would have pounced onto Dazai to punch the man in the face.

“Just saying, it’d be a waste.” Hooking an arm around Atsushi’s shoulders, Dazai swooned dramatically. “The least shorty can do is treat a fair lady right. Imagine serving that nasty dishwater to a girl! Isn’t that right, Atsushi?”

“...I’m not into drinking.” Turning his head away while trying to peel Dazai off, Atsushi desperately searched for any method to divert the attention away from himself. “And we have younger students here. I don’t think that’s an ideal date for any of them either.”

“I prefer milkshakes and burgers!” Mina said with a huge smile, trying to help Atsushi out. He returned a small nod of thanks when he wrestled out of Dazai’s hold.

“A movie date?” Bondo from Class B raised his hand.

Kaminari and Kirishima both yelled, “Pizza and arcade!”

More giggles came from the group. Atsushi slipped over, putting a hand on Bakugou's shoulder. "What about you, Bakugou? What would you like for a first date?"

"Huh?" An almost choking noise came out of the blond. It was more guttural as if he had threats that he was forced to swallow back into his lungs. His whole body recoiled slightly from the question like it was a plague. "Who's got time for shit like that?"

And that was when Todoroki noticed what the detectives were doing. Between the stiff turn of conversation and the odd rigidity in Atsushi's question, they were making sure none of the students were within eight feet of the mafia. While their attention was caught by Dazai's overly dramatic taunting and Nakahara's animated reaction, Atsushi had been weaving around the students quietly. He stepped just a little too close, waved his arms a little too wide that his motions shepherded the students to unconsciously move back.

Like now, Bakugou was no longer the closest to Nakahara as Atsushi apologized for upsetting him, probably hitting a sore spot with the insensitive subject.

"I'm not upset," Bakugou said through gritted teeth.

"He's totally upset," Mineta snickered.

Aoyama took a few steps back before making a jab too, "That's not a flattering expression, Monsieur Bakugou."

"Highly unattractive."

Spinning around, Bakugou hissed, "I'm bloody fucking attractive."

"He's doomed to be single like the rest of us," whistled Sero.

"Shut up, you extras!"

He stopped shouting when he noticed the mafia moved.

"This is a waste of time Dazai. I know running into you means it's a bad day." Clacking his tongue in annoyance, Nakahara pivoted around to walk away. However, he only took a few steps before he glanced back, glaring from underneath the rim of his dark hat.

The weight that suddenly dropped on everybody's shoulders was nauseating. The heaviness was different from simple exhaustion or lifting weights. It felt as if an entire building was descending down upon them, using their bones as levers to remain standing. Their muscles were squeezed against their organs, pressed inward until no cavity remained even in their lungs.

A flare of fire flickered along Shouto's left cheek while Fukidashi beside him was ready to scream words into reality. However, Dazai's hands landed on their shoulders and Shouto felt his core emptied. It was different from when Aizawa-sensei erased their quirks, where his powers were inactivated. This time, he felt the fire in him being suppressed. No three dimensional words popped out of Fukidashi's head either. Instead, a pale exclamation mark replaced the usual speech bubble that was above his neck.

“Chuuya,” Dazai warned. His voice dipped lower, more serious than Todoroki had ever heard him. A growl also came from Atsushi as his upper body leaned forward. The veins popped along the back of his hand, where his nails appeared sharper than normal.

The mafia tilted his hat at them as if they were parting on polite terms as the pressure on everybody lifted. “To answer the explosion boy’s question: If you step out of line in our city, prepare to get crushed by gravity.”

With that, he walked away, leaving the students to gasp for air while cold sweat drenched their backs.

3

They delivered the shaken up students back to the hotel before circling back to the office.

Atsushi ducked when he opened the agency’s door, avoiding the slipper flying right at his face and allowing it to slam into Dazai.

“Dazai!” Kunikida screamed as if seeing red. He stormed over, peeling the other man off the floor and ignoring all the cries of abuse from Dazai, who was obviously faking the pain and protest. “You–”

“Chuuya’s not actually going to kill any of the UA kids. Right now, he’s the least likely to harm them out of everybody in this city,” Dazai interjected, trying to defend himself against Kunikida’s rightful fury. “He’s a softie on the inside and has a lot of principles. Unless Mori explicitly gives a kill order or the UA kids actively threaten their operations, Chuuya’s going to turn a blind eye.”

Atsushi still thought it was a risky move. The kids probably thought Dazai was mad too. Why would he provoke a Port Mafia executive in broad daylight? But then again, Dazai was the type to stomp anybody’s dignity into the dirt and he was already suicidal. Why *won’t* he push a few more dangerous people’s buttons just for laughs?

But that wasn’t any of Dazai’s concern. “We wanted to make sure the future heroes understand Yokohama. That little threat was just the opening.”

“Is there an interlude in your plan where we actually get looped in to what’s going to happen?” Kunikida scoffed as he dropped Dazai into a chair. “Not all of us are Ranpo.”

“Then it takes the fun and believability out of your reactions.” Atsushi was sure Kunikida wanted to wipe the smirk off Dazai’s face. “And I helped Atsushi with his task. You only get a passing grade though, Atsushi. The delivery was too out of the blue and stiff.”

“I’m sorry…” Atsushi muttered. His head hung lower and if he was in his tiger form, his tail would be dragging behind him.

“So, did you find out anything from Bakugou’s answer?” Kunikida turned towards the young man.

“Not really. He was surprised then got kind of defensive when his friends started teasing him.” It wasn’t abnormal. The only thing that Atsushi noticed was that Bakugou wasn’t as brash as people said he was. There was a more sensitive and careful side to the blond. The awkwardness and somewhat squirmish scoffing he exhibited when his friends talked about love was genuine too. “I don’t think the topic of romance crossed his mind a lot. That’s normal for a hero kid, right?”

When he looked at the men for confirmation, the two of them only shook their heads.

“If you say so,” Dazai said easily in his usual carefree voice.

“I will believe your judgment,” sighed Kunikida, “Dazai’s not the best person to ask about teenage romance.”

“Hey! I had plenty of romantic encounters back in the days. I started many of the pursuits of love too.”

“Right,” agreed Kunikida with a dead and dry voice. “So if I go track down some of the girls you ‘dated’, they are going to give you glowing reviews of how it just wasn’t meant to be?”

Most of the women probably want to murder Dazai themselves. A few of them would certainly not hesitate to put a bullet between his eyebrows. Actually, even those that never dated Dazai would be more than happy to do that for them too.

Beaming, Dazai pulled out a stack of paper and a pen. “*Please* don’t ever do that. I’ll get you the report you want right now!”

4

They made it through another day without somebody dying.

Katsuki would call that an achievement. At the cost of his sanity slowly being chipped away, none of his classmates or the 1-B kids had lost a limb. It was exhausting but it was working.

Mostly.

Stupid Ranpo. That detective with his thin little eyes must be onto something. Katsuki was so done with this bullshit. It felt like whatever he did, it would be wrong. But what was new? That was pretty much his life so far. His whole life was just one circus after another. There was no act that he could put on that would be good enough.

There was never an “enough”.

So he’d make do or do without. It lasted him this far, it would work as long as he kept his cool. Play it safe. Explode when fitting. Hold his tongue even if he wanted nothing but to strangle the hell out of some bastards. He was amongst peers, not allies. Even if he was with friends, none of them had anything to do with his issues.

"Man, that was intense." Kirishima had dragged Katsuki to the common area on their hotel floor. It was a lounge styled space where people could watch TV together and enjoy a pot of

freshly brewed coffee. Their whole class was gathered there while Iida and Yaoyorozu told Aizawl-Sensei what happened.

Most importantly, they now knew the face of a Port Mafia executive! That was important information for the heroes to have.

"His power is like Uraraka's but reverse. He made things heavy and he didn't need to touch us." Iida explained while his hands moved around.

Deku also had his arm raised high as if they were still in a classroom. "I don't think we can limit it to only making things heavier. He mentioned gravity. Maybe he can also make things float?"

"That's a scary power," whispered Sausage Lips. His sentiment was echoed by plenty of the others. "Really thought we'd go down without a fight."

"We don't know if he has a weight limit like me." Round Face pressed the paddings on her fingers together.

Wrong. There was no limit to the calamity gravity could cause.

"This is great information on the villains," Aizawl-Sensei said after he gestured for people to settle down. His sharp eyes scanned over the students before he sighed. "I'm really sorry you had to go through all this. The people of Yokohama aren't very open to discussions but President Fukuzawa had guaranteed they will ensure our safety to the best of their abilities. We just have to follow the rules. So no late night sneaking outs or any funny business, alright?"

It must be difficult for the pro hero to admit they were the ones needing protection for a change. Katsuki would have found an excuse to go back to bed but the rest of his class picked up the topic of love again after their teacher left.

They talked about arcades and movie theaters. Holding hands on their way home from school and riding a bike together down a hill. It was nice, he supposed. Fun and chill, that was the normal process of falling in love for the first time for the average population. They met in class, at a club in school, cheering on each other at sports tournaments or enjoying each other's company while out shopping. That was how people grew close and eventually decided on the one.

Except, none of that was what Katsuki associated with a life partner.

The first kiss was salty. Tears soaked through the chapped skin of another's lips that were pressed against his. The heat under his palm gave away to coldness as long hair slipped between his fingers. There was a tangle in the locks, a small knot of messy hair that he combed out gently. The first date consisted of throwing insults like firing machine guns with the foulest or nastiest words possible. Their backs glued against each other because they couldn't stand the sight of each other's faces but neither chose to peel away. Someone laughed in the midst of cursing while the other hissed in pain as the TV broadcasted some terrible murder or mysterious disappearance. The touch upon his skin was often cold-like

scales or stones—but the kiss was always warm. When the night wind brushed through his hair, the heavier weight of a coat would land on his shoulders.

"Bakugou, you alright there?" Mina asked. Her eyes landed on the clock. "It's almost eight. Bedtime?"

"Yeah," answered Katsuki without much thought.

"You're always clocking out so early. That's why you miss all the after school group chats!"

The group chats Kirishima pulled Katsuki's socials into were filled with jokes and memes anyways. Nothing that couldn't wait until he got his work done. "I can check the memes in the morning."

"Boo, you sound like my grandma." The girl stuck her tongue out at her, easing the lingering tension in the room with her infectious laugh. "Alright Sleepyhead, good night. The rest of us are going to stay up a bit more to watch reality TV. They have stuff that the outside channels don't have."

Katsuki shrugged, heading back towards the room he shared with Kirishima. Before he was out into the hallway completely, he heard Midoriya talking about Dazai with Todoroki.

It was a bit sooner than Katsuki expected but they figured out Dazai's ability to nullify superpowers.

Chapter End Notes

Hope everybody's having a wonderful week!

I'm getting around to the comments, thank you ♡♡

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1

They were halfway through the field trip.

One more week before they leave Yokohama. Aizawa was ready to hole up in his sleeping bag and not get up for a month after this. He missed his good sleeping bag, the yellow one that he liked the most. While he did pack another that was more durable and suited for travel, he hadn't been able to use it.

He hadn't had a need for it so far.

At first, it was packed as a precaution because no one knew exactly what kind of condition they were going to be hosted in. Aizawa would admit that like most people, he fully anticipated more beat down infrastructures; Leaky pipes, drafty rooms, and covered in dust of theme. In the worst case scenarios that he played inside his head, they would barely have running water. For a city overrun by villains, it felt rational enough to assume a more "end of the world" situation. Maybe the elites or the top criminals would live in luxury while the normal civilians and the resistance were holed up in dirtier places.

But that wasn't Yokohama.

Yokohama was at a level of peace that was almost disturbing.

Was this the city generations of heroes feared? Why?

"No one can defy gravity."

That was what Aizawa learned a few years ago from the lips of a captured villain. He had partnered up with local police on taking down an underground drug ring. The heroes seized a bunch of common street drugs, laced into edibles or packed in fancy sleek packaging to be sold on university campuses. Port Mafia was suspected to have a hand in the supply chain but there was hardly any real evidence to support that. Based on the veteran detectives' guts, they would swear up and down that Port Mafia cleaned house before the heroes could track anything back to them.

The scared admission from the villain only further added to their suspicion but it wasn't *evidence* that could be used in a court of law.

The criminal must have been referring to Nakahara Chuuya.

But back then...Nakahara would have been a teenager if the description Aizawa's students gave him was correct. Somebody not that much older than the kids in his class.

Port Mafia was using child soldiers.

The conclusion twisted Aizawa's stomach uncomfortably as if his organs were roped around a burning coal. While no active threat had barged towards them, the mental drain of this field trip was already taking a toll. He was paranoid of the people he passed by on the streets, wondering if there was an ability user or a criminal amongst them. The conversations with President Fukuzawa and the local police were exhausting too. They evaded questions and if Aizawa thought the police on the outside took other task forces or heroes nosing into their business terribly, the ones in Yokohama were leaps and bounds overboard with that loathing. He had to decipher their words, second-guess his previous theories and answers, then jump right back into another conversation that felt more like an interrogation.

It wasn't because of Aizawa's status as an underground hero either. Even Vlad, who was more well-known to the public, didn't receive much of a warm welcoming. One time, when Vlad purchased a newspaper from the convenience store, the old store owner gave him the stink eye when he learned Vlad was a hero.

It was a hostile environment.

Aizawa was trying to understand why Yokohama hated the heroes this much but it was proving difficult, especially with the constant surveillance. The only silver lining was that while still cautious, the Yokohama locals didn't project any of that resentment towards the students.

Still, they needed to have a chat with ADA.

"We'd like to know what you have planned for our classes for the rest of our stay, preferably it doesn't involve running into more mafia." Aizawa and Vlad went straight up to Kunikida early in the morning. The students were gathered in a conference room at ADA's office, enjoying pastries and coffee while watching the morning news with Dr. Yosano.

While hotel breakfasts were decent, the kids voted to try a bakery today. Atsushi and Kenji had been kind enough to deliver the breakfast for them so the UA members didn't crowd the small shop. The two detectives then went out to work on a case.

"To be completely honest with you, we don't have anything planned." Kunikida was completely serious when he made that admission and even looked a little bit sorry for their under preparation. "We didn't think you'd last this long."

While Aizawa appreciated the transparency, he was silently seething on the inside. "Yet, here we are."

"We have one more week as per the arrangement," Vlad added. The man was standing beside Aizawa with his arms crossed in front of his chest. After this field trip, they were going to need a few cases of cold beer together. On the outside of course. There was no way either of them wanted to get drunk in this weird city.

Nodding, Kunikida suggested, "They can continue to shadow us—"

“Why don’t we bring them to Suribachi City?” Dazai sauntered over, more cheerful than chirpy than the rest of the detectives still in the agency.

Kunikida’s eyes grew wide, staring at Dazai as if he sprouted a second head.

“Suribachi City?” Aizawa repeated suspiciously.

“It’s a great place to visit,” explained Dazai with a sincere voice that Aizawa absolutely didn’t believe in at all. From his years of dealing with suspects and slippery con-artists, Aizawa knew this man was the type to lie through his teeth without a second thought. Slimy like an eel too. Sure enough, Dazai flung the glass doors to the conference room wide open in the next second, causing everyone inside to stare at him. “Hey kids! Who wants to go to the biggest Chinatown in Yokohama?”

“Chinatown?” Midoriya repeated just as Dazai stepped into the room.

“Dazai!” Kunikida yanked him back by the collar, preventing the man from bumping into Shinsou, who was sitting closest to the door. “That’s Huang’s territory.”

Still smiling, Dazai waved at the students even as Kunikida shook him like a bubble head. “If we’re talking about the lowest gang or criminal activity rates, Suribachi takes the cake in all of Yokohama. It’s not under Port Mafia’s rule either so technically speaking, it’s the safest area in the city.”

What?

“Wait, there’s a part of this city that’s not under Port Mafia’s control?” Kaminari jumped up, expressing shock for everyone else.

“Yep!” Dazai untangled himself out of Kunikida’s hold.

“Why didn’t we just stay there from the start then?” Kaminari was baffled and so were the rest of them. Even Aizawa was a bit confused. Sure, logistically, there might be issues. Maybe the transportation was lacking. Maybe the hotels nearby were all booked. Maybe it was more of an industrial area that was filled with factories and offices with little living spaces. They had such a large group that Aizawa wouldn’t be surprised if they ran into some of those issues. However, it was strange for the detectives to only mention this place *now*. If there was a neighborhood in Yokohama that was safer than the rest, he’d imagine it’d be one of the first stops on their list of places to visit.

Unlike touring the front of Port Mafia’s base.

A few of the other students also murmured their agreement. Also...

“What do you mean by ‘that’s Huang’s territory’?” It was a very important question. They knew Yokohama was run by gangs and Aizawa wouldn’t be surprised if there were still yakuza taking protection money from the citizens in this city. Was there another gang that was on par with Port Mafia? Or else why would the criminals leave that area alone?

“Suribachi City is Huang Corp’s headquarters,” Dr. Yosano was the one who answered. The woman sipped her coffee slowly, meeting Aizawa’s questioning glare with a small smile that was more of a mask than a friendly gesture. “Suribachi City is safe as long as you don’t cause trouble.”

“You said ‘Suribachi City is Huang Corp’s headquarters’,” Monoma suddenly said. He got out of his chair to better face Dr. Yosano. “Should it be ‘Huang Corp’s headquarters is *in* Suribachi City’? You phrased it as if the whole place is theirs.”

The detectives shared a look before Kunikida sighed, “Because it essentially is.”

“Wait, this is Huang Corp? As in Huang Corp, the big prosthetics company?” Yaoyorozu was excited, filled with bewilderment and surprise but also confusion.

“Momo, do you know them?” Asui tugged on her friend’s sleeve to calm the girl before she jumped out of her seat.

Noticing that she was getting too excited, Yaoyorozu’s face was dusted pink. “I...My family did a few businesses with them. They are really revolutionary when it comes to prosthetics and medical transplants. But if they are based in Yokohama...I guess that’s why my parents never talked about paying the founder a visit even though they’d love an opportunity to meet him. They say he’s a child prodigy.”

“That’s true, Huang Zeku’s about Atsushi’s age so he’s not that much older than you kids.” Dr. Yosano pointed out the window, towards the sea and not in the direction of Port Mafia’s towers. “Huang Corp owns a lot of the land in Suribachi City. In a sense, you can say that Suribachi is basically his.”

The detectives explained that the founder of Huang Corp was a genius. It was the story of a boy who built an empire from nothing as if taken right out of a movie. He was a brilliant brain who transformed Suribachi City from the slums into what it was today, building peace upon the wreckage of violence. Because he didn’t approve of disorder, he invested in infrastructure and charity to create a safe space for everybody that was neutral to the gang violence.

“That’s so manly,” Kirishima sniffled, “he sounds like such an awesome guy.”

“Yeah!” Ashido beamed too. “It’s so great that he’s giving back to the community and helping his neighbors out.”

The rest of the kids were all talking and shouting over each other to talk to their friends too.

“I can’t believe he’s only eighteen? Seriously, what’s this guy made of?”

“It’s like his life is on an accelerator. What do you mean he had a start-up turned multi-million dollar business and built a neighborhood all before he can legally drink?”

“He might be for show only. To drive up sales and talk through click bait titles.”

“Rich and charitable, I’m kind of hoping he’s hot too.”

“Um, everybody?” Midoriya raised his hand shakingly, trying to get his peers’ attention while the larger kids were blocking him from sight. “I think Shinsou has something to say.”

The purple haired teen flinched slightly when he heard his name called but it was barely notable to anybody other than Aizawa. Shinsou had shown potential during the sports festival. Aizawa could see that spark of what it took to be a hero in this boy. While his quirk wasn’t the most well-received or battle-oriented, it was certainly nothing to brush off.

Brainwashing was powerful.

It just took the right training to learn how to use it properly. Also, of equal importance was that the kid must learn how to use it with restraint. The line between a villain and a hero was thin. Aizawa couldn’t count the times he had seen someone tilted a little too far and slipped down the wrong side. The power Shinsou had could become justice’s greatest asset or its deadly enemy.

Aizawa wouldn’t let a student slip down the wrong path right in front of him. So he reached out to Shinsou after the Sports Festival. They came up with a training plan that would allow Shinsou to have his shot at heroics, without the bias of the entrance exam. The boy responded with hard work, climbing just as Aizawa knew he would and that was why he was invited on this Yokohama field trip as well. They’d like to give all of their students their fair chance at growth and learning.

Shinsou was a good student, his only flaw being that he wasn’t used to speaking with others nicely or conveying his true thoughts. No doubt it was a product of his childhood, where people constantly poked fun at his “villainous quirk”.

Scratching the side of his neck with a bit of unease, Shinsou questioned the detectives, “How?”

His focus ended up on Dazai, who tucked his hands into his coat pocket while waiting patiently for Shinsou to organize his words.

“How did Huang Zeku create a neutral zone?” Taking a deep breath, Shinsou started firing off his thoughts. “Why would the mafia listen to him? Why is he so special that everybody who might be somebody is willing to follow his rules? It doesn’t make sense. How does a business in medical equipment keep control of a territory compared to armed villains?”

A few quieter gasps sounded from the students. They finally realized now too. There were loopholes with Huang Corp’s origin story. If they were anywhere else, none of them would probably think too much but this was Yokohama.

Nobody survives Yokohama without dabbling in some sort of darkness.

Dazai laughed, patting Shinsou on the shoulder in encouragement. “You’ve asked some great questions. See, the details are too complicated but you can think of Huang Zeku as a really powerful ability user. That’s why they call him the Dragon of Suribachi City.”

Frowning, Monoma asked, “And Port Mafia is okay with that? Does Huang Corp pay protection money or a bribe to them?”

“Port Mafia has no say in Suribachi City’s operation,” Kunikida answered. “Unless you have a death wish, you don’t touch what belongs to the Dragon. Port Mafia learned that the hard way so now they stay out of Suribachi.”

Aizawa found that hard to believe. The organization that would boast in the heroes’ and the government’s face was scared of one guy? Somebody who was possibly just a young adult too?

“You don’t believe us,” observed Dr. Yosano. The woman wasn’t offended by the obvious skepticism on their faces. “How can one kid do so much and be so powerful, right? There’s a fun legend about Huang that you might like. Back when Port Mafia’s previous boss was still in charge, a kid with red hair keyed his car. The next day, the previous boss ordered all the kids with ginger hair in Yokohama to be killed.”

Aizawa’s fists tightened by his side. Killing a child was horrid enough as it was but to order the death of hundreds of innocent children who just happened to be born with the wrong hair color? That was beyond cruel. He could see Sero and Kaminari holding onto Kirishima tighter. Other kids also stared at the teen’s red hair. Kirishima gulped, trying to keep a brave face on instead of flinching at the thought of execution.

“Don’t worry. The previous boss was old and he died of sickness long ago but it’s hard to forget his cruelty.”

“And this is related to Suribachi City because...?” Vlad shifted in his spot. His voice dipped lower as the news of what Port Mafia did in the past must have sparked the growing flames that were burning in all of them since they arrived in this strange city. Aizawa knew how the other hero felt but a part of his heart also settled back into its proper place.

This was the real Yokohama.

“Huang Zeku has red hair so people say Huang is the malevolent spirit of the children coming back from the dead.” Her voice remained soft even if the topic was gruesome.

“Immortal and haunting, the sins of the past will pave the way for the future.”

Aizawa didn’t quite understand the lore. It was difficult to imagine ghosts being in the mix when they hardly understood the limits of an ability.

“So you’re saying Huang Zeku just as dangerous as the mafia?” Aizawa pressed. Most of the ability users were dangerous to some level. Principal Nedzu and All Might confirmed it in the staff meeting before this trip. Many ability users gathered in Yokohama as freelance mercenaries or they were a part of a criminal organization. Some came from war. Others were taught to kill. Many still had a hand in the shadows of society. These weren’t regular thugs or junkies looking for quick cash or a fix. They were professional lunatics.

Some researchers proposed that abilities affected the owner’s minds, turning them unnatural. They didn’t have large enough samples to record data from but no human mind could

withstand such supernatural powers without breaking down in some way. Aizawa didn't know how much of that was true but the reports of chaos caused by an individual ability user was often ten-folds of a regular villain with quirk.

“Yes.”

“And you want to send our students there?” His voice was starting to raise.

Dazai physically moved in front of Aizawa, blocking the latter's line of sight while Kunikida was also standing in front of Dr. Yosano. The dark haired detective shook a finger in front of Aizawa. “See, here's the thing about Huang. He doesn't care about anything so long as you don't disrupt the peace. You can race down the street on all fours with tin foil hats while shouting ‘All Hail The Aliens!’ and he won't bat an eye. People can slash their own throats in front of him and he'd step over you as if you were part of the ground.” That last part felt like a personal attestation. “To put it crudely, he's a complete egoist who's too lazy to lift a finger, unless you annoy him enough.”

That didn't give Aizawa any confidence. It was also contradicting. How did someone who was supposedly lazy fought his way to the top and grabbed a piece of land in a city filled with criminals? Was it for survival? Now that he was doing exceptional, he had other people to do the dirty work?

“If it helps, Huang Corp hands out the Penal Code to their employees as part of their training manual. Like this one,” Kunikida offered. Aizawa didn't know where he pulled it out from but the man raised a thick book of criminal law out of nowhere.

Aizawa didn't know if that was supposed to be a joke or some form of mockery. Sighing, he turned to the students. Vlad gave him a curt nod before they started addressing the teenagers.

“We will do a vote then,” Aizawa announced. “Those of you who want to go to Suribachi City, raise your hand.”

Everybody's hands went up. While also anxious, the kids were brave and excited to explore a different part of Yokohama. The detectives also suggested that he could get another trusted Suribachi local to help supervise the trip, along with Dazai and Atsushi. Unable to sit by any longer, Vlad also volunteered to accompany this trip. Aizawa had already discussed this with Vlad in private. While gathering intel was important, they couldn't keep letting the kids be out of their sight. Meanwhile, Aizawa would spend some time with Dr. Yosano to continue gathering information. It wasn't wise to bring any students along or attempt high level infiltration missions without backup so mostly Aizawa would try to get a lay of the land. From important buildings to critical traffic conjunctions, they needed to understand what was going on in Yokohama.

They expected to hear some argument or persuasion from ADA but the detectives agreed surprisingly easily. It was so swift and fast of a decision that was shocking.

It wasn't hard to figure out the Yokohama locals were trying to separate them from the students. One meeting after another where different people bored them with political small talk. These people had been wasting their time and keeping them in sight.

“Remember,” Mr. Kunikida warned again before the kids left the office. “Do not use your quirks and don’t try to be the hero under any circumstances. You’re here as tourists, so just enjoy the city and not worry about fighting injustice. There are adults for that.”

Judging by his glare, he certainly didn’t have the pro heroes in mind when he spoke.

2

Suribachi City was a small island connected to the main of Yokohama by a bridge. Its entrance was unmistakable just like the five black towers under Port Mafia. The giant circular gate stood tall and its doors were made of bronze and steel. Twin lions each with a ring in their mouths lined up in the center as if it was an entrance to some old Chinese palace. Beyond the opened gates, the buildings were connected by overhead corridors. Traditional wooden structures mixed into the concrete jungle, brushing pieces of history into modern time. However, there was something dystopian about it. Ads and posters covered the walls while red lanterns hung between balconies.

Time was mismatched in Suribachi City. Traditions of old from another land mixed into Japan’s local lores. Both foreigners and locals, those with quirks and those without all mingled together in the busy streets. It was a scene out of old movies, where woodens bridges arched over canals, connecting cobblestone ground. Tiled roofs and gray brick walls, vines crept along the towers.

“Oh my god! This place is cool!”

“What are those candies over there?”

“Hey, they’re making popcorn in a barrel!”

Midoriya and his friends didn’t know where to look at first. There were so many colors everywhere and the mix of scents from street food were overwhelming. It was as if they had stepped into a different world.

A tall man with reddish hair and dark brown eyes met them near the gates. He wore a loose shirt and a light coloured coat. While there were a few stubbs on his chin, he had a very laid back atmosphere about him. He also gave off a more reliable air than Dazai.

“This is my good friend Odasaku!” Dazai announced, ignoring the man’s complaint about how his name was Oda and not Odasaku. “He will be helping out as a tour guide.”

“Class B goes with Dazai and your teacher. Class A is with me and Atsushi,” Oda-san instructed while handing out small pieces of paper with phone numbers on them to every student. “We will regroup here at 5 PM. If you are lost, you can ask to use the shop’s phone to contact us and stay put so we can go get you. Dazai, don’t jump into the ocean or try shoving yourself down a well again. I’d hate to get another call from Huang Corp’s security.”

“Odasaku’s so mean,” whined Dazai while leaning his weight on the taller man as if he was boneless as an octopus. “Don’t worry, we’ve got a bunch of heroes with us. One of them surely knows First Aid.”

Oda-san rolled his eyes, peeling Dazai off him. Turning his head, he waved in Midoriya's general direction. "Follow me please."

They followed the man, venturing into the lively streets. Suribachi's ground steeped downwards closer towards the middle of the island. While the main roads were wide, there were also many stairs that took people up the side of buildings. Elevations of glass corridors or metal overheads crossed over each other as if it was a maze. At some places, if they raised their hands, they could touch a lantern or the leaf of a vine climbing out of another's balcony.

"This place is awesome!" Mina yelled.

They bought a mini instant camera and took a lot of photos as a class. A bunch of kids in class bought different snacks to share so everybody could have a taste of the different stuff. Oda-san was a great guide too, telling them the stories of Suribachi City and where to find the best coffee or sweet treats. He also answered all of their questions.

The locals here were nice to them too. One vendor even gave Mina a freebie bracelet when she bought keychains in the shape of cats.

"It's for good luck!" the vendor smiled. "You won't find anything like it anywhere else."

The bracelet was made of red strings with a fake gold dragon. However, Midoriya thought this dragon looked a bit off.

"It has three eyes," said Todoroki as Mina passed it for him to see. The details weren't very clearly carved since it was a cheap bracelet but the bumps on the dragon's head appeared to be three eyes instead of the standard two. "Is that a local lore? Something related to Huang Corp?"

There were already rumors of ghosts and he must be called the Dragon of Suribachi City for a reason.

Oda waved his hand, telling them not to think too hard. "Rumors fly faster than the wind. People just like to make things more dramatic than they actually are. This island has a heavy gate and Huang Corp makes good business. That's why people think this is a dragon den where Huang Zeku keeps his treasure trove."

"There seems to be a heavier police presence here. Is it because there's a lot of foot traffic from the rumors then?" Kirishima asked as he finished his chocolate chip ice cream. The heroes did the same thing. On their internships, they learned about patrol from the pro heroes and busy cities always had a denser cluster of law presence in areas where commotion or scuffles could be potential problems.

"That is one reason." Oda-san mentioned for them to look closer at the men in uniform around the corner. "See their uniforms? The one on the right isn't a cop. He's with Huang Corp's security team."

Both of them were in short sleeves and bullet proof vests. The utility belts around their waists almost appeared to contain the exact same tools or aids too. However, the officer had badges

and the police emblem on her hat. When the man turned, the kanji for Huang was printed across the back of his vest in yellow over overlapping lines shaped like a diamond. He also had a black cap instead.

“Huang Corp has them patrolling the neighborhoods all the time. They help the older folks out or get cats off trees so emergency personnels can focus on the more urgent cases.” The man pointed down the road then towards the opposite end of the street. “Most of everything here is owned by or associated to Huang Corp in some way. Their security also do the training laps around here so don’t be alarmed when you see groups of big muscles running past.”

A neighborhood watch consisting of private security personnel basically. Midoriya noticed tattoos on the security that passed by them. They moved better than local street thugs or older guys with beer bellies who had never seen a fight larger than a customer dispute before too. If he was to guess, some of them might have been ex-military.

“So...schools, shops, a company, patrol,” Sero counted off the things they saw so far. “This Huang guy is really going all out.”

According to Oda, Suribachi wasn’t always this nice. The special landscape they saw was because a giant explosion had gone off years ago. It was a dump culturing the worst Yokohama had to offer. Poverty and violence was common. Those who were left homeless camped over the ruins while more people down on their luck were chased from the better parts of Yokohama to this corner of the city. Worn down buildings and homeless tents or paper box sleeping places clustered on the slopes. The people were malnourished and tattered like the trashpiles they lived in. To get electricity and water, there were hazardous wires or pipes exposed all over as new gangs fought over the available resources.

Huang Zeku devoted the money he made into rebuilding this place. As he built, other people saw opportunity and more stores moved in. A lot of people wouldn’t be around today if he hadn’t stepped up.

“Are you one of the people he helped too?” Iida asked out of curiosity.

“Oh, I actually didn’t grow up here. But he did save my family before.”

Oda-san explained that he had been involved with Port Mafia at the time. They couldn’t believe it. The man didn’t look like he had a single mean bone in his body! He had even adopted and was raising multiple orphan children all on his own! Even though he was low ranked, he got targeted by some bad guys and the villains tried to kill off his children. At the time, the kids lived with a nice chef who owned a restaurant in a safe part of Yokohama. Huang Zeku had been having lunch there when the villains attacked and he beat them up for disrupting his meal.

“Huang really sounds like a great guy,” sighed Kirishima.

Yep. It reminded Midoriya of vigilantes from the old ages. Back when being a hero wasn’t a profession, there were still people taking up the mantle to protect those weaker. Some of

them could act scary to fend off evil but ultimately, they were good people trying to save others.

Laughing, Oda shook his head as if he heard the funniest joke in the world. “Don’t say that to his face. He’s not somebody you want to meet in person, trust me.”

“Why?” Midoriya joined in on the conversation and he knew other people from his class were listening too. “He selflessly invested his fortune, saved kids from villains, and his company revolves around giving people better lives.”

“It’s hard to explain. You’d understand if you see him face to face but I really hope it doesn’t come down to that.”

The man didn’t answer any further as they arrived at a circular plaza with a fountain. There were shops and food trucks and small pop up artisan stands all around. They were told that they could break off in smaller groups as long as they all stayed within this plaza. Some people can enjoy the sun with ice tea or venture into one of the shops to try on cheongsams. Midoriya saw Kacchan going into a tea shop to get something to drink while Atsushi followed him. The rest of his class were undecided about what they wanted to do when one of the old shop ladies called Oda over to chat with her.

And that was when they noticed Mineta was missing.

“Hey, where’s Mineta?” Sero suddenly piped up when he saw that their group was missing one person.

“He was just here?” Kaminari spun around “Oh there! Behind the bushes.”

Their short classmate was crouched behind a bush and he smiled with a perverted grin. No drool dripped from his parted mouth but the pink across his cheeks was a sign of trouble.

“Cute girls in Chinese outfits!” He seemed to be in a trance as he stared into the distance. Before they could grab him, he was already racing off to god knew where.

“Hey Mineta! Don’t run off on your own!” Iida called after him but the other boy wasn’t listening. Being the class representative, Iida raced after him and the usual Dekusquad followed.

“I’ll go find him too,” Kaminari said with a straight face. “This is totally not because I want to see cute girls in Chinese dresses.”

Jirou smacked him but followed.

“Wait, don’t leave us alone!”

Soon, the whole class had gone off, chasing after one another and before they knew it, they were in an unfamiliar place.

“Um...where are we?” Ojiro asked nervously. “What is this place?”

They were on an unfamiliar street. Most of the stores were closed and there were neon signs everywhere. The buildings looked older and more crowded, some looked out right dangerously close to collapsing too. Trash and needles littered the ground along with shards of broken glass.

“Isn’t it obvious, this is the red light district! Women in all sorts of sexy outfits!” Mineta sounded disgustingly excited. Sure enough, the class soon noticed the very erotic and suggestive ads placed all around.

“Oda-san did mention something about how there were still parts of Suribachi that were a little stuck in their old ways...this must be what he meant.” Uraraka huddled closer to Tsuyu, gulping as she tried to avert her eyes from the nude signs plastered on windows.

“We should get out of here, like now.” Aoyama eyed their surroundings suspiciously. He was right. There wasn't anyone around and this place looked spooky even in the daylight. “Bakugou isn’t with us.”

“I don’t think he followed us. He was in the tea shop with Atsushi,” said Midoriya. “Shinsou was with Oda-san.” So at least two of them were still safe with their guides.

Todoroki went a few steps ahead to look around the corner before coming back. “...Who remembers which direction we came from?”

None of them did. The alleyway and the buildings all looked so similar and dark, where blinds or wood shielded most of the windows. Every corner was essentially the same with no signs while the crooked roads led the more and more stairs in all directions. The class moved in a tight group while trying to find their way back to the plaza. They ran into people but none of them thought it was a good idea to ask the locals for directions. These locals were like ghosts staring at them from the shadows, eyeballing them as if they were butchers judging how fat the lambs were.

That only made Class A want to get out of here even more.

They were halfway up a flight of stairs when they heard noises from a muffled conversation. When they turned the corner, a group of men had a young kid cornered. It was hard to tell if they were a boy or girl when the kid wore a loose blue magua jacket with butterfly prints and white shorts that came down to their knees. There was a red tassel dangling from their belt and a Chinese knot made of similar red threads clipped into their hair. They were holding a yellow envelope against their chest as their shoulders trembled.

“Hey! What are you doing?” Tokoyami shouted. Sato and Shouji also rushed forward, pushing themselves in front of the child. The men barked a few insults but they ran off together when they saw the rest of Midoriya’s class approaching.

“Are you okay?” Sato bent down a bit to ask while Shoji backed away. Unlike Sato, who just appeared more muscular for his age, Shoji’s giant form with extra limbs and his mask didn’t make him appear the most approachable.

“Yes, thank you for helping me.” The kid looked up. They had dual colored hair like Todoroki, except that their right side was brownish black and the right was pale white. There was a fluffiness to the curls that fringed their face and their hair flowed down past their chin. Based on their height, they might be a few years younger. Most probably around twelve to thirteen.

Also, they might have a quirk.

Midoriya met the kid’s stare. Their right pupil was a ring of gold circle while a gold star was trapped in their left eye. Most of the quirkless Yokohama locals that they had seen on the streets didn’t share this kind of feature. It was more consistent with the population they’d find outside of this city.

The split hair and the different eyes...maybe they were like Todoroki who had two quirks?

“Nice to meet you,” they greeted them politely with a light dip of their head. When they turned, there was a doll strapped to their belt beside the tassel. It was a rather battered and creepy looking old doll where its head looked like it was made of wrinkly rags. There were white bandages wrapped around its forehead while its eyes were just two giant black holes. Rows of sharp teeth were sewn into its wide mouth too. “I’m Yumeno Kyuusaku.”

“Kyuusaku-kun, can I call you that?” Tsuyu moved closer to the front of the group and she continued when Kyuusaku nodded. “What are you doing alone out here?”

“I’m supposed to deliver this to the Suribachi Orphanage.” They held onto the envelope tighter. Giving the class a small smile, Kyuusaku glanced over their group curiously. “Are you tourists?”

“Yeah, we’re on a field trip.”

“That’s nice. I don’t see school groups from the outside often.”

“How do you know we’re from the outside?” asked Todoroki.

Kyuusaku seemed confused as they tilted their head. They pointed to Tokoyami and Shoji then at the other kids in Class A who had obvious physical mutations. “What a silly question, big brother. It’s rare to see people like you in this city. All of you look so different and there are so many of you of the same age. Obviously you aren’t siblings.”

“You’re very smart, Kyuusaku-kun,” complimented Mina.

“Of course!” Kyuusaku lifted their chin higher. Their smile grew larger too. “That’s what my tutors say too.”

Kyuusaku looked down at their watch, saying they had to hurry or they would be late.

“What’s in the envelope?” asked Sero while peeking over Sato’s shoulder.

“Five hundred thousand yen.”

“What?”

The class erupted in an uniformed shock.

“Five—shi—sorry!” Kaminari’s voice broke as he slapped a hand over his mouth. Looking down at his fingers, he muttered, “How many zeros is that?”

“...Is that in cash?” Iida had to take a deep breath to calm himself.

“It’s a donation to the orphanage.” Kyuusaku stared at them innocently, oblivious to why they were all up in a clamor.

Midoriya stared at the thickness of the envelope. It certainly could be that much money in cash inside. Where were Kyuusaku’s parents? Why would anybody let a kid this young walk around with so much money?

They couldn’t let Kyuusaku continue to walk through this neighborhood like this. Since Kyuusaku said they forgot their phone, they suggested that Class A could come with them to the orphanage. The hero students could borrow the orphanage’s landline.

Midoriya shared a look with his friends before everybody agreed.

They followed Kyuusaku down the road while talking. Kyuusaku was very curious about life outside of Yokohama and they kept asking one question after another.

“What is a villain?” asked Kyuusaku.

“It’s someone who does bad things. They hurt other people or misuse their powers for evil.” Midoriya stared at the silver butterfly sewn on Kyuusaku’s sleeve. There were other people who wore more oriental clothing in Yokohama. Compared to them though, the quality of Kyuusaku’s clothing appeared better, like the ginger haired lady dressed like a geisha that Midoriya saw from afar when they were near Port Mafia’s towers.

“So what’s the difference between that and a criminal?” The soles of their polished black Mary Jane tapped against the stone stairs as they hopped a few paces ahead.

“A villain is a criminal though? They did something wrong and bad.” Uraraka answered but it sounded like she was unsure of what the younger kid was asking.

Kyuusaku blinked as if trying to register the answer but they still smiled. “Who decides what is wrong and bad then?”

"The law."

"Why?"

But they didn’t wait for an answer or elaborate as they sped ahead, waving at the group before turning down the alley.

After a few turns around corners that were nearly identical, they started seeing improvements to their surroundings. The ground was no longer littered with trash and there were less and less spray painted swear words on the walls. A few homes had flower pots outside their doors and a bit later, they found a three level gray building behind a white gate. The metal gate was open and there were pastel drawings on the sidewalk. Above the arc of the front door, there was a sign that read: Suribachi Orphanage.

Behind the gate, there was a small playground and grass lawn. Clothing hung off ropes to dry on the other side and there was even a small vegetable garden in the corner. Kids in similar gray sweats were playing soccer or running around the yard.

“Oh, Kyuusaku-chan!” the little girl on the swings yelled as she jumped off, running inside the building while shouting for her friends and the staff. “Granny Yuki! Kyuusaku’s here!”

An old woman came out to take the envelope from Kyuusaku. She was dressed in a simple orange dress and white apron. While drying her hands on the apron, she greeted them all with a warm smile.

“It’s been a while, Kyuusaku.” A strand of stray gray hair fell in front of her forehead as she leaned down. She had kind eyes, gentle and respectful even when talking to children not even a third of her age. “Thank you for delivering the funds from Huang Corp.”

Kyuusaku smiled and told her about Midoriya’s group.

“Oh my, poor things.” Shaking her head, she waved her hand at one of the older orphans standing by the doorway. “I don’t blame you. It’s very easy to get lost around these parts. Unfortunately, the cell tower for this area is under repair. Our phone won’t be working until tomorrow. Why don’t you kids rest a bit and have a drink of water? Kyuusaku can walk you back to the main roads. It’s safer to go in a group.”

While the orphanage was clean and organized, it wasn’t hard to see their equipment were outdated. They didn’t have the funds to get tablets and the staff were all older folks who weren’t good with technology. They rarely needed their landline too since most of their associates visited in person.

It was almost absurd how back in time this place was.

“Granny Yuki!” A boy around eight leaned his head out of the window on the second floor. Through the opened window, Class A could see there were other kids moving behind him. “Are those new kids?”

“No, dear,” Granny Yuki answered. “They’re just lost.”

The boy ducked out of sight but soon, the future heroes found themselves being surrounded by the kids of the orphanage.

“Wow! Big sister, you have pretty pink hair!”

“Are those tape at your elbows?”

“Saki! Look! She’s invisible!”

“What happened to the left side of your face, big brother?”

“That’s rude, Daisuke.”

“You’re from the outside! Have you met All Might before?”

The younger kids were all chirping like a flock of excited sparrows. Midoriya looked around, noticing how the kids that gathered around them were around six to thirteen. He saw a few older kids about their age hanging behind Granny Yuki. Some of them hurried past while holding even younger toddlers. There was also another staff member in orange with a baby who needed Granny Yuki’s help with a sick child.

Two shorter kids came out to play chess with Kyuusaku. They were set up under a tree in the yard while other kids swarmed around Class A, pulling some of the teens to join them in soccer or skip rope.

“Kyuusaku, you dropped your handkerchief,” Ojirou said as he attempted to pat the younger kid on the shoulder but Kyuusaku’s playmates stopped them.

“You can’t touch Kyuusaku-kun. It’s dangerous.” The little girl stared up at Ojirou with a serious expression. “Kyuusaku-kun is different.”

“Why are they different?” asked Kaminari.

“That’s what the lady who came with Kyuusaku-kun said. We can’t touch Kyuusaku-kun. Kyuusaku-kun can’t play with us anymore if they get hurt.”

“Yeah, Kyuusaku will be stuck at home again,” the other kid added while sticking his tongue out in disgust. “With the big mean baldy who gives out a lot of homework too!”

Kyuusaku was homeschooled and they rarely got the chance to be outside. From what the children said, it sounded like they might have some disease that made their body weak or susceptible to injuries. Their household was also one that emphasized on excelling at academics so their tutors were strict with them.

It also confirmed what Midoriya was thinking: Kyuusaku didn’t belong to this orphanage.

Kyuusaku was different. They had a home—a *good* home—to go back to but they mingled with the kids here without any trouble. The kids accepted him in a friendly manner too.

This was the home to the marginalized. Granny Yuki had a prosthetic left foot, which was a gift from Huang Corp. There were single mom or retired soldier as staff. From what the children said, they were wards of Huang Corp and this orphanage was a part of the company’s charity. Some of the children here lost their parents to gang wars or accidents, some were runaways from abusive households, and others were dropped off at the front gates when they were still in the crib. Not everybody knew their parents and there were plenty who would rather die than go back to any blood relatives.

“Mom had a boo boo in her arm and then she never woke up,” one of the little girls said. The four years old was smiling when she tried to reenact how she found her mother dead and the jarring contrast between her physical language and the tragedy made Midoriya shivered. She was too young to understand the concept of death fully. All she knew was that her mom was in a very long sleep and she could have a full belly in the orphanage, something that rarely happened at her old home.

“My pop’s in jail for grand theft auto.” The older boy tending to the gardens spoke up without turning to face them. He was pulling weed from the yard while muttering darkly, “I hope he gets shanked in there.”

His friend noticed the frown on Iida’s face and explained before the class representative could say anything, “Akihiko’s dad likes to hit him when drunk.”

“That’s horrible,” Yaoyorozu whispered. The rest of their class also nodded in sympathy.

“That scumbag’s not my dad!” Akihiko shouted. “What’s a dad good for anyways? Come back once a month to beat the shit out of his own kids? Come home to order everybody around and then sleep like there’s no tomorrow?”

“Akihiko! Language!”

The boy jumped up, tossing his gardening tool aside angrily before stomping off into the building. His friend chased after him while Class A stared at each other, unsure of what to do.

“I’m sorry for Akihiko,” Kyuusaku apologized. They dangled a black pawn between their fingers while watching Akihiko vanish into the building. “He really hates his father.”

The youngest of the children stumbled over from the sandbox. She was around three, with dark hair that was curly and messy like a bird’s nest. “Kyuusaku-chan, what’s a ‘father’?”

“Oh! I know! I know! It’s somebody that pays the bills!” a girl chirped. Her friends also added on to the description of what a father should be.

“He makes sure we have food and clothing.”

“He protects us.”

“Checking homework?”

“Stern.”

Then someone threw in, “Basically Zeku-sama.”

The rest of the kids gave it a thought before all nodding in agreement.

“Um, he’d be more like your sponsor, wouldn’t he?” Mineta pointed out.

The children shrugged. Some cocked their heads, staring at Mineta with confusion. “But Zeku-sama does more than they ever will.”

They talked about how they didn't have to worry about life here. It wasn't a life of luxury but they had all their basic needs met. There were those who grew up in other gangs led by children—some kind of organization called Sheep—that disbanded years ago. It was safer under Huang Corp than trying to compete with adult gangsters out there. The children chatted about their dreams of how some wanted to join the police, to become singers and scientists and bakers and teachers. If they worked hard, they would be useful. If they worked hard, the dragon would support their dreams. While most kids their age were asking their parents for hero merchandise, these kids were learning how to sustain themselves. From gardening to chores, the children learned a variety of trades while helping out the neighborhood with small things, like picking up garbage.

"We'll work hard to pay back Zeku-sama."

"If we study hard, we can help Zeku-sama."

They talked with hope in their eyes but there was something strange that Midoriya couldn't quite place his tongue on. It was like when Dazai smiled at them. The man was friendly and even funny but the feeling of unease never lessened.

The children praised Huang Zeku with a feverish passion. When asked what made the man so great, they could only counter with "Because he's Zeku-sama". The way their eyes sparkled with wonder gave Midoriya a sense of deja vu that came out of no where.

A bell rang and the children all went inside the building, saying that they have classes in the afternoon. Kyuusaku also got up. They went towards the gates and waved for the UA students to follow them.

"Let's get you back," Kyuusaku said.

As they followed Kyuusaku up a different flight of stairs, Midoriya hung around the back of the group. When he checked his watch, only about two hours had passed but it felt longer. Halfway up the stairs, he glanced back at the orphanage one more time and saw a painted dragon at the side of the building. It was white and gold with sprawling lines of red and purple as if it had mangled through somebody.

"Deku-kun," Uraraka said quietly beside him. "Those kids back there...I don't want to say this but they feel kind of...like they are operating through a different set of logic."

"Or a cult," Todoroki whispered too.

The uniformed response and the same thought pattern. There wasn't one kid who slacked off and all of them followed the rules to work diligently. The staff were attentive and kind. Everybody helped each other and local companies provided funds to help them where the money all went to where it was truly needed.

It was just too good to be true.

"It's just too good to be true." Kyuusaku's voice rang clear ahead. The child turned around, watching them from above, where the stairs curved up. They leaned over the metal railing,

meeting Midoriya's eyes confidently and tapped the side of their face. "It's all written on here."

Kyuusaku moved again, continuing up a few more flights. "You're a funny bunch. See, what you're thinking is how we see you too."

"What we're thinking? What do you mean?" Kirishima climbed up the railing, flipping over and cutting ahead of the group to get closer to Kyuusaku.

"You think we're weird because we speak highly of one man but you do the same on the outside." Kyuusaku swayed their body back, continuing to move forward. With their hands over their head, they said, "His name is All Might, right? The symbol of peace. A big guy with hair that goes up like this. Mister made a lot of funny expressions. He is your hero and we have our own. You think we're obscene just like how we think you must be crazy."

Midoriya felt a tingle up his scalp. The more Kyuusaku talked, the strange feeling in Midoriya expanded. His heart pumped faster as if there was a fire alarm exploding inside his chest. Words climbed up his throat but he didn't know what to say. There was nothing to refute, he supposed. Yokohama never had any heroes so they couldn't have known how much the heroes did for the greater...that was it! Those kids looked up to the ones who helped them just as Midoriya loved the heroes.

When people don't have heroes to follow, they found others to use as a guiding light.

But why was Kyuusaku talking as if they had met All Might before? Did they saw a video of the No.1 hero? Studied him just like Midoriya did?

He felt a hand around his wrist, stopping him from moving forward. When he turned, it was Tsuyu who was holding him back. The girl's tongue unrolled out of her mouth as she wetted her chapped lips. She was nervous. Midoriya could feel her hand tightening around him.

The others in class also stopped moving.

"Tsuyu, what's wrong?" Mina placed a hand on the shorter girl's shoulder.

"I've been thinking...Why would a company that big ask a minor to deliver a large sum of cash alone?" Tsuyu asked with a shaky breath. "Even if it is a cheque, why did they have to deliver this in person instead of depositing it right into the bank?"

Her question made everybody else tense. They all had doubts but the happy orphans and Kyuusaku's nice smiles...it didn't seem like they meant any harm.

Tsuyu released Midoriya. They all watched as the child placed their hands on the back of their head.

"You don't have to be so on guard. I just wanted to meet you all." Kyuusaku was still smiling. "A bunch of future heroes is hard to come by in Yokohama. Your principal sent you here to learn about us, right? So I'm helping you! You can't just look at the shining mafia

buildings or follow detectives to crime scenes. Those are boring and don't get the full picture.”

With every word that came out from them, the class stepped back but Kyuusaku wasn't fazed or affected by the tense atmosphere.

“Kyuusaku-kun, who are you?” Iida asked in a low voice.

“Yumeno Kyuusaku, I told you already.”

“This isn't funny.” Todoroki moved in front of their classmates, shielding the ones who were less combat oriented.

“Yeah, I don't like that last name.” Kyuusaku kicked a pebble, letting it bounce down the steps and skidding into grass growing between cracks at the edge of the road. “My parents didn't like it either so they ditched it after they tossed me away but that's okay. I'll get Father's when I'm older.”

They weren't making sense. How could their parents abandon them but they still have a father? Why would their parents discard them? What did Kyuusaku want? Was Kyuusaku leading them to somewhere dangerous?

But that wasn't what was important right now.

“Where were you taking us?” questioned Midoriya. It was quiet in this neighbourhood. There weren't any signs of life in the buildings that looked like abandoned shreds or factories still in construction. They could hear the rotor or some kind of engine running from not far away though. Was there a generator or construction crew nearby?

He stretched his neck, watching the kid who had moved a distance up the hill of stairs away from them. The buildings on the two sides casted a shadow over Kyuusaku, painting all of their hair dark as ink. They smiled, the stretch of white teeth revealed from their splitting grin a sign of joy despite the low rumble in the ground that was closing in. Giggling, they took another large step back.

“I want to show you all something fun.”

The stairs between them and Kyuusaku exploded.

Chapter End Notes

Can you guess where this plot is going? $\psi(\vec{\nabla})\psi$

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Warning: Blood and gore. Slight BSD spoilers. I twisted some of the backstory so it's not all Canon.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

1

Shinsou was starting to regret this field trip to Yokohama.

He appreciated the opportunity. Since he was already behind everybody else in heroics, he didn't want to fall behind any further. Midoriya and the others were working for their dreams but they weren't the only ones. There was nothing that Shinsou wouldn't give to have a fair shot at a spot he knew he could prove to be worthy.

Unlike what everybody thought, his quirk didn't define him.

Venturing into a city full of criminals? Yes, he'd absolutely do it if it gave him a chance to catch up but deep down, he had been scared too. He had less experience than the rest, both when it came to using his quirk in battle and in martial arts. While Eraserhead had been helping him improve his skills, he wasn't allowed to bring his voice-mimicking mask along. Also, quirk usage was forbidden all together. That left Shinsou with just his wits and a scarf made of the same material as Eraserhead's capture weapon.

He didn't know why the soldiers at the city's entrance didn't confiscate it but he wasn't dumb enough to start asking. Unlike some of the other hero kids, his body was still a work in progress. While the others had already gone through basic training, Eraserhead said Shinsou still needed to work on his stamina. It was hard to learn how to move in battle. Always on the move, always on alert, navigating both an unfamiliar weapon and trying to analyze situations was taxing.

Shinsou didn't want to be dead weight in Yokohama.

He was ready to grit through whatever hell that may await them. Perhaps blazing guns or cannons, murderers running down the streets, looters and hooligans or other bad people attacked them in his imagination. But no, Yokohama proved to be peaceful.

When ADA first mentioned detective work, Shinsou thought they would be learning some kind of private investigator lessons. The usual would be to catch evidence for affairs, scavenge the neighborhood for lost pets, or other similar stuff since the heroes normally took care of investigative work too. However, the detectives in Yokohama were different.

They actually consulted on criminal cases.

They were learning proper detective duty, which Shinsou knew would be handy for their job in the future. It wasn't uncommon for sidekicks to join the police department if they weren't popular with the public after a few years. Learning more was always advised. Nobody wanted to be a sidekick forever but really, not everybody could have a career in heroics for life. Yet, he couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed and relieved at the same time, which was a feeling that was soon replaced by a profound confusion.

Why?

That was Shinsou's question because this city wasn't making sense. The criminals didn't want any fame. Teenagers worked to support themselves completely. The police cut deals. One guy had the final say of an entire neighborhood.

There were no heroes or villains but there was peace.

It didn't make sense.

And he didn't know if they should be this relaxed in Yokohama. How can they be buying souvenirs when they had no idea why they were even allowed into this city in the first place?

"Where are your friends?"

"Huh?" Shinsou turned, looking at the plaza and while there was a small crowd, he didn't see anybody from Class A. "Maybe they went into the shops?" he suggested, silently praying that it was true as dread slowly slugged down his throat.

The plaza wasn't large enough to conceal twenty teenagers. While Shinsou hadn't spent a lot of time with the Class A kids before this field trip, he knew that Kirishima was quite loud when excited.

Oda sighed as he stepped away from the hotdog stand, pausing for a second before turning towards the tea shop. Shinsou hurried behind him.

"Oda-san?" Atsushi was coming out of tea shop with Bakugou sipping bubble tea right behind him.

"Where are the rest of the students?"

"What do you mean? They are right—" Atsushi's nose wrinkled a bit and his eyes widened. Frantically, he scanned around the whole plaza before his face paled. "They were by the fountain! I swear!"

He was rambling as he tried to remember what happened. Bakugou wanted bubble tea and Atsushi was feeling thirsty too so they went into the tea shop. Both of them got a sweet drink then the blond needed the washroom so Atsushi followed. It was routine. If the kids couldn't go in pairs, the detectives would accompany them to make sure nothing happened to them around the more secluded corners of the city. Still in thought, Atsushi took off, running through the different shops to check for the rest of Class A.

A crunch of plastic caught Shinsou's attention.

Caramel brown liquid spilled onto the cobblestone as Bakugou tossed his broken cup into the trash. Shinsou met Bakugou's eyes and immediately, he moved to block the blond teen from grabbing Oda.

"You lost our classmates?" Bakugou barked in disbelief. He didn't put up much of a struggle against Shinsou's hold but he did shove Shinsou off violently. Snarling, he growled, "Don't touch me, Eyebags! How the fuck do you lose a bunch of teenagers? Fuck, those idiots got sidetracked didn't they?"

He mumbled a bunch of other swear words and reached a hand into his pocket. However, Bakugou stopped moving as if remembering that their phones didn't work in Yokohama.

Rubbing the bridge of his nose, Oda called Atsushi back over.

"Can you track them?" the man asked.

Atsushi shook his head. "The smell is too strong in Suribachi."

He was looking at the street vendors when he said that. There were hot dogs and popcorn and fast food being sold. The scent of coffee mixed with freshly cut fruit from cafes and pastry stores. The aroma of spices spilled from restaurants while occasionally, motor exhaust from the cars moving past overwhelmed everything else. People moved around, their perfumes lingering lightly in the air and it was summer. People sweat.

"Call Dazai," Oda said. "Tell him to bring Class B over here. You stay here with Bakugou and Shinsou to wait for them and in case the kids come back. I'll look around. They couldn't have gotten far."

"What should we do?" asked Shinsou, eager to help. While he wasn't particularly close with anybody in Class A, he didn't want them to be wandering around in a strange city either. The detectives gave them repeated warnings about not being alone. There had to be a reason for that...right?

Oda glanced at him. "Stay. Don't touch anything or talk to anybody. Stay put until Dazai tells you otherwise."

The man ran off, swallowed by the sea of people.

"Why can't we go look for the idiots?" Bakugou clacked his tongue just as Atsushi finished his call to Dazai. "Also, shouldn't someone call our teacher?"

"We will," Atsushi promised. "But look, Suribachi is the worst place people can get lost in so we're not going to have everyone running around randomly, hoping to bump into each other. This place is built like a maze."

That was true. All the overheads and underpaths could easily disorient people. There were corridors connecting buildings horizontally and diagonally. Elevators hidden behind a corner

or stairs going to god knew where. Not to mention the construction sites and the change in elevation and road detours.

“It’s also very dangerous if you encounter trouble here since you don’t know the landscape.” Atsushi pointed to the lanterns above them. “You have to really know the neighborhood to be able to navigate around here, especially when on the run.”

“So we just do nothing?” Bakugou sounded annoyed.

“For now, yes.”

Atsushi called another number and soon, the speakers on the plaza started announcing for the missing students to report back to the plaza fountain. It was like the PA system at the mall, where security used it to call parents of lost children to the customer service stand. It was slightly embarrassing to hear a bunch of teenagers’ names called.

Also, it was awkward to stand next to Bakugou.

The blond obviously has his temper. Prideful to the point of pure arrogance, it was obvious this wasn’t the type of person Shinsou particularly enjoyed being around. He would admit that Bakugou wasn’t all bad though. At least, he never made any negative comments about Shinsou’s quirk and while Bakugou liked dissing people about being inferior, he had the talent to back up his confidence.

It was annoying but not so repulsive that Shinsou hated the guy. Sure, it would probably feel amazing if he could kick Bakugou’s ass in training one day or beat him in the next Sports Festival but so far, Shinsou could manage the silence.

Bakugou tapped his foot impatiently beside Shinsou while Atsushi made another call.

“They are going to find Midoriya and the others,” said Shinsou quietly as he stared in a random direction. There was one building larger than the others in Suribachi City. The tower stood tall like Port Mafia’s but it had a lot of balcony gardens and the roof was tiled as if it was part of a temple. Large circular windows lined what looked like a penthouse at the top.

It felt a lot more lively and livable than Port Mafia’s black skyscrapers.

A grunt came from Bakugou. “Let’s just hope those bastards make it back in one piece.”

That Shinsou could agree.

2

Monoma didn’t think “Plus Ultra” should entail a Chinatown of overly friendly if not scary looking locals.

There were bulky dudes equipped just as well as the police. People with yakuza tattoos. Bald. Scared. Loops of metal piercings. Metal parts and prosthetics that could wiggle like real digits but also popped off randomly to prank the less suspecting.

Something about the buildings here was also different. The sheet metal and the fans and wires were set up in a way that Monoma had never seen before. He wasn't sure what most of anything worked here, except that he knew the style was rather retro.

It was almost as if they stepped into some sort of dystopian cyberpunk world.

His friends were all excited, shopping for souvenirs and enjoying good food. Monoma tried to fit in too until Kendo pulled him to the back of the group. "Monoma."

"Yeah, I don't think we should talk about that here." He finished the last of his crepe before answering. There was definitely something off about the people here, even compared to the rest of Yokohama.

It was strange to describe. They just felt different. Monoma wasn't sure if there were any words to describe what they were seeing either.

"You think it's weird to see such law-abiding and upbeat model citizens?" Dazai appeared behind them, causing them both to flinch.

"We were just—" Kendo started but she was cut off.

Dazai waved his hand dismissively. "Come, I'll show your class something interesting."

The man waved at the rest of Class B and Vlad, signaling them over. He led them down a narrower road to a photography studio. The store looked normal but they had a bunch of old photos on the wall. Couples and family and graduation examples were all lined up against a backdrop of sky blue wallpaper.

"Hey, Gramps!" Dazai greeted the old man behind the counter cheerfully. "I got a group of tourists here, mind if they take a look?"

"Sure." The old man smiled. He was plain and dressed simply in a white shirt with black trousers. "Class field trip, huh?"

"You don't seem too surprised?" questioned their teacher. The pro hero had to duck a little to squeeze through the shorter door since this studio was half in the basement.

"We get more medical tourists but there is a first time for everything, lads."

"Medical tourists?"

"Yeah, to Huang Corp and Suribachi Hospital. They won't get a better fit of prosthetics anywhere else."

"So what are we here to see?" Monoma moved past his peers, staring at the pictures on the wall. They started in color but the further back in the room, the photos were black and white. Also, it changed from normal cityscape and family photos to piles of garbage or what looked like a third world country.

Ruins. Beat down ghettos. There were Japanese and English signs occasionally but from afar, it was a mountain of trash.

“This is Suribachi City before Huang Corp came along.” Dazai pointed to the photos.

“What?”

“But this place is so different?”

“How did they build everything so fast?”

The class was asking one question after another all at once until Vlad-sensei ordered silence. Dazai smiled at them, seemingly happy to have all of them so intrigued.

“All very good questions. See, there was an accident that leveled Suribachi City in the past and this place became a slum where the poorest and vilest gathered. When Huang Corp started, they had patrols set up and gave the devastated people jobs. Soon, other shops started moving in, and this place flourished. They imported outside technology from I-Island and other places just like your school did. That fortress of Principal Nedzu’s had to come from somewhere.”

Dazai’s fingers glided over the edge of brown picture frames. A switch was flipped and the room went dark, spooking the class. Monoma saw a hazy outline where his teacher instinctively grabbed at Dazai like he was capturing a villain but the detective evaded the movement easily.

“Relax,” ordered Dazai.

Light beamed from a projector to an empty wall. The photos were blurry but when played together, it showed the progression of how peace sprouted upon wasteland.

“There are only two rules to Suribachi City: Don’t cause trouble and don’t touch what belongs to Huang.” The dark haired man’s voice was smooth and his expression unseeable in the shadows. “Suribachi doesn’t need those who can’t follow the rules so as Huang Corp expanded, it squeezed out the ones who can’t or don’t want the change. In the shortest time possible, any possibility of unrest or dissent were stomped out. That’s how Huang Zeku made this—” The final shot was of Suribachi City’s front gate, sealed ominously instead of opened wide like how it had invited the UA students in—“into reality.”

The light flickered back on, making Monoma squint along with the rest of his classmates.

Dazai didn’t use any harsh words or explicitly described how the change happened in detail. However, there was a weight to his words that pinched Monoma’s tongue.

“...So, you’re saying that they took over by chasing everybody who doesn’t agree to their way out?” Kendo gulped. Monoma saw a bit of her orange ponytail swept past the peripheral of his vision as she moved in front of Dazai. “What happened to the people they gave up on?”

“Jail. Dead. Somewhere else. Who knows? All the drug addicts and lowlives are better off gone anyways.” Dazai shrugged. The indifference was all too evident in his relaxed posture.

“That’s cold,” someone muttered in the back of the group.

“I’m glad you think so,” the man’s cheerful and light tone took a dip. “Now here comes the food for thought: What is the difference between what Huang Corp did and what the heroes are doing? Because of the rise of heroes, where did you think all the more unsavory characters went? Better yet, what happened to your quirkless population as they got outcompeted? If you want to ask how much blood builds Huang Corp’s name, you will need to do a little introspection first too.”

Cold air drained into Monoma’s mouth as he inhaled sharply, the invisible mass of oxygen weighing more than it should and pressing against the back of his throat until he thought he tasted bitter rust.

They had similar problems on the outside. But was it really the same? Because of the rise of heroes, the villains either went into hiding or changed their ways. Crime rate went down. That was good, right? So what was the difference between that and what Huang Corp achieved? People change. People can thrive for better. Monoma glanced at the old shop owner but quickly looked away. Outside the shop, Monoma could see the people of Suribachi City going about their day normally too. They agreed to Huang Corp’s way, didn’t they? Maybe most would say “good riddance” about all the troublemakers being gone. At least, Monoma couldn’t count the times he heard people around him express similar opinions when news of villain arrests came.

If he felt bad for those discarded in Suribachi, why was he relieved to see villains be gone on the outside for similar crimes?

Monoma didn’t know if he should keep thinking.

Vlad-sensei actually got his hand on the detective’s shoulder this time. As a warning, the hero leaned in closer, his shadow intimidatingly towering over Dazai. “We didn’t agree to this field trip for it to be a propaganda introduction.”

“This isn’t propaganda. All I’m doing is asking questions.”

Dazai stepped back, moving away from their group. The way he talked was annoying. Always something half-mentioned, clues hinted at and small nudges towards an unknown direction with his words. However, just as they wanted to follow his lead or dive deeper into the topics, he pulled away without a care. It didn’t hurt. It wasn’t uncomfortable or nauseating but Dazai’s words were like the claws of a cat, scratching along the edge of curtains but never quite digging in hard enough to cause a rip in the threads.

“It’s a method during desperate times and that was just what Huang Zeku chose to do. Some violence is legalized here just as they are in your world. What is the difference between that and your justice? You are the future heroes, you should be the ones deciding the answer.”

Somehow, that was a sinister suggestion. To leave them to their own thoughts with endless possibilities after providing ambiguous suggestions... Monoma wasn't sure how to make of the tightness compressing his chest right now.

They left the studio. It was when Monoma was bathed under the bright sun, he noticed that his fingertips had grown stiff and cold.

Dazai picked up a call. When it ended, he turned to face them with a funny look and announced, "Class A is lost somewhere in Suribachi."

There was a moment of silence before Shiozaki pressed her hands together in the form of a prayer. "God, why must you test us so..." she mumbled as strands of her green and thorny hair fell in front of her lowered face.

Yep. He must really hated them from up there.

3

Midoriya lowered his arm while the dust was starting to settle. There was a crater where the steps of stone stairs should have been. A middle-aged man laid unresponsive in the center of it, limbs sprawled out lifelessly as blood dripped from his parted lips.

He was dressed in a tacky yellow and black striped suit. There were clumps in his blond hair, where his hair gel mixed with blood.

"Holy shit!" Kaminari swore as he pointed a shaky finger at the man's feet. "G-Guys? He is missing his right foot. Momo, can you create some bandages?"

Yaoyorozu raised her hand but Jirou slapped it back down.

"We can't use our quirks," Jirou reminded in a hoarse but urgent voice as panic swelled behind her eyes. "That mafia guy warned us."

It was ridiculous to think they couldn't even use their quirks to administer first aid but the detectives made it clear. If they stepped out of line, the agreement between UA and Port Mafia would be off and all of them would be in danger.

"No quirks then!" Todoroki stripped out of his jacket, running towards the injured man with Iida. Their action snapped everyone else out of the initial shock. Right, they weren't heroes because they had a better quirk than the rest of Japan. They were training to be heroes that could take on any situation.

There was another rumble in the ground. Something was closing in.

Midoriya looked around in a hurry.

"Izuku!" Uraraka yelled as she pushed a manhole cover loose for him. Holding it up as a shield, Midoriya ran towards Todoroki and Iida. He heard the air snapped before he felt the weight lessened from between his hands. Immediately, he released the manhole, watching it vanish under a flash of dark shadows that gnawed through the metal.

“What is that?” Sato. Midoriya felt his larger classmate’s hand yanking on the back of his collar just as another dark strip embedded itself between Midoriya’s feet, nearly taking out a part of his red runners. “It looks like cloth?”

It did look like some sort of fabric. Shinier than Aizawa-sensei’s capture weapon and the fabric was smoother too. A dark and reddish aura enveloped its length as it slithered through the air like snakes.

“Teenagers?”

There was a man on the roof in the direction where the injured guy had flown from. This man was younger, probably around twenty. His black hair was chopped short but the tips of his bangs were white. With skin as pale as paper, his voice had a sickly rasp to it while his body was thin. However, his eyes were sharp and gray as a blade.

The dark fabric that attacked them was connected to his coat. Everything about this man was either a deadly plague white or or dark as the night. Dark dress shirt and dark pants, his black coat dragged down to his ankles and he wore a jabot as if he was going to attend a funeral next.

“Who are you?” Mina asked. She took in a deep breath before yelling, “We’ve called the cops. They’re going to be here any minute!”

It was a bluff and Midoriya hoped the man would buy it. However, the man shook his head.

“Step aside or else I’ll kill you too.”

More black threads twisted to life from his coat, extending out to slice through assailants that appeared behind him. The black fabric pierced through two men’s torso like spears. Blood rained down, sprinkling over the edge of the roof.

Then the glass windows beneath shattered. The man moved, vanishing as the sound of metal scraping against something dense sounded. Sparks flew in the air, moving so fast that it was hard to comprehend any actual movement in detail.

“Todoroki, watch out!” Iida yelled as he tackled Todoroki to the ground, rolling away as another body dropped beside the first injured man.

Koda put a hand over his mouth while Ayoyama gasped. They had seen Nomu regenerate itself after its limbs were frozen and chipped. While shadowing the detectives, they also saw bodies but the sight in front of them right now was different.

Intestines spilled out of the opening from the men’s stomach. Blood pooled underneath them, leaking from raw flesh with a ragged edge. White bones poked out from the mangled mess of another’s shoulder, the sharp ridge of his shoulder blade completely exposed. Screams pierced the air, louder than Present Mic when he used his quirk. They weren’t dead but were close to it. At the end of the rope, the men cursed and writhed and squirmed.

Death had a scent.

Dust and blood and dirt mixed together in a puddle of urine as somebody soiled themselves.

And the smell of approaching death was even harder to endure than they imagined. There were no technicians who cleaned the scene and collected the murder weapon into neat little bags. There were no detectives by their side to lead them through logical steps of deducing a motive.

The danger was also far from over.

It all happened so fast.

The man in the coat walked closer.

“Out of the way.”

His eyes were cold and he talked of this torture as if it was the same as filling out an excel before lunch.

“We can’t let you kill him.” Kirishima rushed forward, holding up a pipe like a bat. “I don’t know what’s going on or who you are but this isn’t right.”

The man frowned in confusion but before any anger slipped through, his eyes widened slightly in realization.

“...Right,” he muttered darkly while covering his mouth to cough. Between coughs, he scanned the rest of Class A students’ faces and the anger dissipated, replaced by annoyance. “The hero kids from UA. I don’t know why Boss and the others are even bothering with you all.”

The way he said that felt like he was assessing pigs for slaughter.

“Where’s your guide?” he asked.

“Why should we tell you?” questioned Tokoyami, who grabbed a plank of fallen wood to use as a weapon too. It probably wasn’t going to do much but it was better than nothing.

“I doubt ADA would let you all roam free in Yokohama.” The man coughed again, one hand on his chest to ease the pain in his lungs. He was ill but the heavy air around him and the threat of the strange fabric extending from his coat still had all of them on guard. “This is Port Mafia’s business. If you continue to interfere, the No Kill order won’t apply.”

The mafia?

“Murder is illegal,” Ojirou said. His voice was steady but Midoriya could still hear a shaky undertone in his words.

“Obviously.” The man rolled his eyes.

“The ADA will catch you.”

“Just get out of my way if you don’t want to die.”

When nobody moved, he sighed. The man took another step forward, only to be stopped by Yaoyorozu.

“This is not Port Mafia’s territory.” Yayorozu’s legs were trembling but she met his sharp gaze. “Don’t cause trouble. That is the rule of this place, so stop.”

“That’s right!”

“Patrol must be coming soon.”

“We haven’t broken any rules or used our quirks.”

The rest of the class shouted. Surely somebody heard the chaos. The police and patrol or somebody else would come. Port Mafia stayed out of Suribachi City for a reason. Even if Midoriya and the others were still a bit blurry on understanding it fully, they would use whatever they could to help them out of this situation.

It would be so much easier if they could fight.

There was one man in front of them, even if they couldn’t fight, they could run and locate Oda-san. Also, Midoriya lost sight of Kyuusaku when the mafia showed up. The child was nowhere to be seen, Midoriya had no idea if they got buried under rubble or ran off. Did Kyuusaku purposefully lead his class to run into the mafia then? Why?

“Rashomon.”

Threads of black fabric whipped past them, driving through the men on the ground. It felt as if they blinked and the next second, the man grabbed a hold of Yaoyorozu by the neck, lifting her off the ground. His hand around her throat cut off her scream and before anybody could speak another word, his hold on her tightened.

“You think you’re smart.” The displeasure was thick in his voice. While it wasn’t hatred, the disgust was strong behind his words. “Who do you think you are to threaten me? You know nothing about this city. You’ve barely been told the surface about how we operate but you think you can walk in here and get your way?”

Yaoyorozu gasped in pain. Her mouth was open as she choked and her fingers dug into the man’s hand, only to be stopped by a thin layer of fabric. The fabric covered the man’s skin like armor.

“Let her go!” yelled Todoroki angrily. The temperature around him dropped and small patches of ice crept over his sleeve.

Green electricity cracked upon Midoriya’s skin. He could do it. Go in and pretend to land a kick just enough for the man to release Yaoyorozu. Create an opening. Tsuyu or Sero could snatch her back to safety and they would all run. They would get the cops. They would find

Dazai and Oda and help. His eyes met his classmates', seeing the understanding pass between them.

He was about to charge when he heard the gunshot.

Bullets rained down on the man holding Yaoyorozu, only to be stopped by the tentacles of black fabric. A shadow appeared over them, descending fast and hard.

"Oda-san!" Shoji's voice.

Oda-san didn't answer him. Another shot was fired and that was when Midoriya saw the silver gleam of the gun in Oda-san's hand. The gun was like an extension of the man and it spun between his fingers as if it had a will of its own. So close against each other, Oda-san dodged the mafia's attacks by just a hair's breadth. Somehow, he could always escape death in the nick of time and their battle was a dance. Bullets drove into the fabric, pushing at full force but never able to penetrate and touch the dark haired man. Flashes of dark red sliced the air, followed by the click of another clip reloaded under seconds. Each pop of gunshot came with the powdered spark, which was dispersed by the gusts accompanying a punch or a kick as the two men traded blows.

Stray bullets took out an edge of a window as the tip of the black fabric morphed into the shape of hound heads. Their sharp teeth chewed through chunks of concrete.

The men both leaped back, putting distance between them.

"Akutagawa." Oda-san trained his gun on the mafia. "Don't touch them. They are just teenagers."

"So? They interfered with Port Mafia's business first." Akutagawa coughed. "Those fools planned to leave the Port Mafia to make it big on the outside. You are a coward, Oda Sakunosuke...be glad Boss has decided to forgive you for abandoning your rank but those scum behind you are traitors. Step aside."

"That's why you're killing them?" Because they wanted to get away from the mafia? Wait, make it big on the outside? Was this connected to what the detectives said before about Yokohama criminals wanting to join the League of Villains?

"Midoriya, shut up," Oda-san warned. His demeanor changed. Gone was the easy going attitude and his smile, replaced by a harsh urgency. "Dazai was right that I can't take my eyes off you troublemakers for five minutes. Don't provoke Akutagawa any further."

"He's killing people," Uraraka said as she stood behind Midoriya. A few of their classmates went to check on the mafia's victims but as soon as they touched the men, their faces paled. Kaminari shook his head as blood stained his shaking palm.

"S-save me..." one of them wheezed, gurgling on saliva and blood.

"They're losing too much blood!" the blond teen said in a hurry. "Oda-san, please let us use—"

“Rashomon.”

A spear of black spiked through the man in front of Kaminari from underneath. The man twitched one last time before his entire body turned limp. Blood splattered across the teen’s face and he screamed.

How?

Midoriya looked at the ground, seeing how an edge of Akutagawa’s coat was buried into the group. It had traveled out of sight, attacking from their blindspot.

“I won’t let anybody stand in Port Mafia’s way. Betrayal can only be repented in blood. This is Port Mafia’s internal affair.”

There was a prickling sensation spreading over Midoriya’s scalp. He knew this feeling; The freeze in his veins that traveled down to his feet, nailing him still in place was the same as when he faced the Hero Killer. Behind Akutagawa’s eyes swirled a fire that rivaled the passion of Stain’s belief. This was a man who wouldn’t back down until the last of his blood ran dry.

“Then kill them.” Oda-san’s words made the students gasp. “Let the children go.”

Akutagawa laughed abruptly and he smiled despite how his laugh tapered into a fit of coughs. “And let them walk away thinking they were right? That it was all a stupid agreement’s fault? If they can use their quirks, everything would be different?”

The black extending from his coat whipped against the ground, dragging white lines across the pavement.

“You see it in their faces too, don’t you? How infuriating their righteous hope is. If we let the traitors leave Yokohama, they will leak information about Port Mafia to the outside world. We never said anything about how the outsiders conducted their business, why can’t they leave us alone? Time and time again, who do they think clean up their messes?”

His bitterness was thick as the blood that painted the ground.

“Besides, they should thank us for keeping their enemy’s number down. They knew how to do that well, didn’t they? Just toss all the trash our way and be done with it,” Akutagawa said sarcastically.

“What do you mean?” asked Sero but neither man answered him because a round of applause sounded.

When Midoriya turned his head, he saw Kyuusaku standing between Ojirou and Tokoyami. The child smiled, all giddy with excitement while dead men laid not too far from where they stood.

“I was right. The heroes are all very entertaining,” they said. “And you still get mad so easily, Akutagawa.”

“Fuck.”

Akutagawa took a large step back and the dark aura surrounding his coat spiked up like the fur of a spooked stray cat.

“Everyone, move!” Oda hissed in a low voice. It was almost a whisper like he was afraid to wake a sleeping bear or set off a bomb. “Get away from Q right now. Don’t touch them and don’t let them touch you.”

“Q?”

They didn’t know what was going on but Midoriya’s classmates stepped aside, clearing the area around Kyuusaku.

Why did Oda-san refer to Kyuusaku as “Q”? A code name was only used for heroes or villains. If it was a nickname, shouldn’t it be something more fond instead of an alphabetical label? But it didn’t feel like the right time to ask, not when Oda-san looked as if the ground was about to swallow them whole.

“Why did that psychopath release you?” Akutagawa growled at Kyuusaku. The man’s pupils were constricted, looking more alert and tense than when he killed the men.

“That’s such a weird thing to say. I live here.” Kyuusaku’s smile was starting to become creepy. Why was a kid talking to the mafia like this? So careless and indifferent despite the sweet tone. “Father said we have guests so of course I want to meet them! I’ve been very good in my studies, I deserve a reward. He’s not like Mori-san, who keeps me in confinement all the time. It’s not my fault if people break so easily.”

Without hesitation, Oda-san turned to focus his gun on Kyuusaku. “No wonder it took me so long to find them. Q, why did you lead the UA students to Akutagawa?”

“Those guys have been selling fresh corpses to outside villains, that’s why Akutagawa was sent to kill them.” Kyuusaku unhooked the doll from their belt, hugging it close as if scared but their expression said otherwise. “Rare bodies fetch a higher price and Yokohama is the best place to fish for ability users in Japan. It’s quite troublesome that they think they could operate undetected or get away from Port Mafia’s wrath if they go through someone else’s territory. See, they attract so much trouble and it’s like they’re looking down on us.”

Kyuusaku sighed. “It’s all because of the League of Losers. All the pests are crawling out and causing a ruckus.”

There was a groan of wood and vibration in the bricks before the side of the building closest to them opened up. It must have been a garage of some sort. A blue body bag could be seen in one of the opened trunks. From the ripped hole, an ashen finger slipped out. Midoriya could see a stain of red spreading larger. There were other people in the garage. Men with demon faces and women with sharp fangs, animal ears or claws for hands... They had quirks just like the rest of Class A.

But instead of menacing villains, they looked drugged and dazed, only coming to now and trying to get up.

“W-hat...happened...” the man closest to the door asked, holding his head while attempting to keep upright on wobbly knees.

“We have a lot of guests lately but like you, they can’t stay out of trouble.” Kyuusaku ignored the confused strangers, continuing to talk, “The aunties at the office said they are from a cult. Liberating people from an oppressive society, how everybody should be able to use their powers, be the flames of a revolution, blah blah blah.” They made a face. “How silly. When they say they want to use their powers freely, they are imagining themselves as the ones who will triumph. They say the strong will devour the weak but they don’t know the true weight of their own ideology. Everybody is upset at how they want to shove that half baked garbage down our throats.”

Kyuusaku stopped smiling. Their round eyes were large and dark, empty as a vacuum that sucked all the light away from the world. Cold sweat dripped down Midoriya’s back as he met the child’s blank stare. He could feel something sinister stirring to life. Evil was always motivated by something, always with a purpose even if the goal was to feel a power rush from destruction. He had seen glee in the villain’s eyes before when they thought they could get away with a crime. Stain was determined and he would raze society to the ground for his crusade. Shigaraki had a profound hate for the world.

Kyuusaku had nothing.

The doll in their hand smiled, the threads at its lips pulling themselves apart as it floated above the child’s head. Its head shook as it released a strange and inhuman laugh. It was almost joyous like the music of a carnival but it only made the UA students gulp.

It was a terrifying sound.

“This is Suribachi City,” Kyuusaku said. They raised their hand, where there was a prickle of blood dripping from a sharp pin. The metal had dug itself into Kyuusaku’s flesh as if they repeatedly pressed it deeper. “We’re nobody’s playground.”

“Q! Stop!” Akutagawa yelled but he didn’t attack the kid. The man was hesitating...or that he *couldn’t* attack. Was it the doll? Something was about to happen.

Midoriya could hear his heart race, the beats of pulsing blood drumming inside his ears heavily. Strange purple handprints appeared over the confused strangers in the garage. Some had the mark on their face, others on their elbows or necks.

One also appeared on Ojirou’s hand.

“What is this?” His classmates panicked as the mark got larger.

“The doll!”

“It has something to do with the doll.”

The doll. The doll. His friends might get hurt. Midoriya could reach it. Just one kick against the wall for momentum. He was different now. He wasn't the scrawny kid who would trip over his own feet any more. He could get the doll away from Kyuusaku.

All he had to do was reach for it. Take a leap.

“Midoriya! Don't!” Oda-san yelled but it was too late.

Midoriya's body was in motion, his hand outstretched as he grabbed the doll, yanking it out of the air. When he landed, the doll had a tear in its head where a loose thread caught on a nail at the side of the balcony on the second floor.

And all hell broke loose.

Dazai and Class B arrived at the plaza. Shinsou had never seen Vlad-sensei looked so pissed before and he'd hate to imagine what Aizawa-sensei would explode if the man was also here.

Before being the hero Eraserhead, he was their teacher.

Dazai told Atsushi to take a look around for about a two street radius. The young man took off like the wind and he was back soon after. He found nothing, not even when he got up to the top of buildings to survey from a higher vantage point.

“Odasaku is gone for too long. It couldn't be that hard to find a group of twenty something rowdy teenagers.” Dazai placed a hand on his chin. Deep in thought, his violet eyes scanned over the oblivious locals, watching the crowd.

“So what do we—” Bakugou started but Dazai lifted a hand in front of the blond's face.

“Be quiet.”

The man suddenly stood up straighter. His attention was caught by something in the crowd as he hurried over in a few large strides.

“Care to explain why you are here, Higuchi?” Dazai grabbed a blonde woman in a dark suit by her wrist. She was short and her hair done up in a bun. “And Gin, I saw you too.”

Someone else emerged from the crowd. From their slim frame, they were either a very slender man or a tall woman who was dressed in a punk gothic style. Spiky hair and a silver cross choker, a mask hid the lower portion of their face but they had sharp gray eyes like a wolf's.

“We don't have time for you,” they—a woman's voice—snapped at Dazai. “We're just passing by.”

“I have a missing class of outside teenagers. I don't think Port Mafia's assassins being in the same place they went missing is just a coincidence.”

Assassins?

Shinsou found it strange. While Dazai spoke in a lower voice, they were still out in the open. Shouldn't somebody find them strange to be talking about criminal activity like this? The purple haired teen quickly glanced around, only to see the crowd passing by them as if nothing happened. Some backed away, muttering about youths these days and how a movie was being shot without warning.

"What the hell is going on?" demanded Vlad-sensei.

The women shared a look before the blonde nodded. Her voice was heavy and her eyes bloodshot. The frantic way she grabbed Dazai's arm back looked almost painful too.

"Akutagawa-senpai was sent here for a mission but he's not answering his cell. We need to extract him. About one hour and a half ago, Q was spotted outside of Huang Corp."

Shinsou heard a choking noise from Atsushi and any lingering patience evaporated out of Dazai. His shoulders tensed, no longer able to meet the women's gaze with smiling eyes or poke some easy fun as Shinsou had seen him done in the past few days.

Dazai the detective was a slacker. He spoke lovingly of suicide and loved to eat crab. The man joked and teased and couldn't even act serious for two seconds while working a case. Yet, all of that was gone.

"Would somebody tell me what is going on?" Vlad-sensei yelled in frustration as he grabbed at both the blonde woman and Dazai. "What is Q? What does any of this have to do with my missing students?"

"Q is a walking apocalypse," Atsushi whispered.

"What?" asked Monoma, who was standing too far away to hear.

"Not here." Dazai gestured for everybody to follow him. They walked into one of the smaller alleys, away from the buzzing crowd. When they were somewhere quieter, Dazai sighed, "Q is a walking apocalypse. They are an ability user who kills indiscriminately, inflicting both friend and foe alike. Think of it as a brainwashing quirk or a voodoo curse, except that anybody cursed by Q will become feral and attack every living being around them without a second thought."

Brainwashing? Shinsou's stomach coiled. It was all because of people like that. The stereotypes and discrimination stemmed from those abusing their powers for evil.

"It's nearly impossible to break free from Q's curse once it starts," Higuchi was shaking as if haunted by a nightmare. From how she held her hands together, Shinsou didn't need to touch the woman to know her hands must be rigid and cold as ice. "This is why they should be in confinement! But that psycho never played by the rules! He's supposed to keep the monster locked up. We paid such a heavy price just to seal Q all those years ago...Akutagawa-senpai is in danger."

Seeing that some of the other students still haven't grasped the gravity of the situation, Dazai added, "When Q was first discovered in Yokohama, to test their ability, Port Mafia's boss ordered for them to be sent into an underground fighting ring. Because of their isolated

upbringing, their mental age is younger than their peers. However, Q has a sadistic and twisted mind. They enjoy driving people into despair and madness. They are a natural and the worst person to have such an ability. Originally, Port Mafia planned to keep them as a wildcard of last resort.”

“How do you know all this?” Vlad-sensei frowned. “Why would you know what the mafia did if this was their ace?”

The class stopped talking amongst themselves. The silence was deafeningly loud, painful even. Shinsou could feel his heart rising to the back of his throat as Dazai sighed. The man’s dark eyes landed on Vlad. His mouth was pursed into a thin line as the edge of his brown coat fluttered under a gust of wind.

“Because I was the one who sent Q into the ring,” he said.

It was hell on earth.

Men climbed over each other, their nails digging into flesh as if none of them could feel any pain. Midoriya saw someone’s claw pierced through another’s eyeball. Screams filled the air, every shout loud and filled with frightful shrills. Within a few minutes, the ground was painted red.

It was sticky and hot. The summer sun burned their skin. Midoriya saw the glisten of sweat on his friends’ foreheads as they ducked for cover. Winds carrying the scent of the sea added the smell of salt to the nauseating mess occurring in front of them.

People turned on each other like mindless monsters. One woman saw her own reflection in the window and she smashed her own head into the glass with a roar. Blood sprayed over the broken glass as her hair got tangled in the window frame.

“Ojirou! Snap out of it!” Tokoyami yelled.

Ojirou’s eyes had turned red and he snipped at anybody who tried to get close. His tail banged against the brick wall while his fists flew into the air. Kirishima caught one of Ojirou’s punch while Sato grabbed the teen’s other fist. Unable to stand by any longer, Sero’s tape shot out, wrapping around Ojirou but whatever Kyuusaku did, it seemed to have removed any instinct in a person.

All that was left in them was a rage to destroy.

Ojirou struggled without any regard for his own body. He snarled and drooled as more of their classmates pressed him to the ground. The rest of them were trying to keep the others away.

“This is bad.” Kaminari stumbled back but then he screamed. “Holy shit! He wasn’t dead?”

The man in the black and yellow striped suit was crawling on the ground, dragging the nearly severed lower part of his body behind him. He clawed at Kaminari’s feet, only to be kicked

away by Mina who was trembling right after.

They didn't know what to do.

Should they attack? Should they try to contain them?

What was happening? Why does everybody suddenly look like they have terminal rabies? Akutagawa sent black whips towards the people attacking him, only to be shoved by Iida and Todoroki. They pushed the man back and out of harm's way.

"What are you doing?" shouted Akutagawa angrily.

"You can't kill them. They are not themselves!" Todoroki yelled right back with equal volume. Ice froze the ground, sealing two of the mindless puppets closest to them.

Iida pivoted around, snatching Mineta away from a headbutt. The engines to his legs throttled, heating up and ready to be in action. "How do we stop this?"

Right. Kyuusaku.

With the doll was limp in his hand, Midoriya searched the crowd for the child.

"Don't! Stop using your quirks and run!" Oda-san's voice carried over the gunfire.

"Are you really telling us that when we're under attack?" Uraraka screamed in disbelief. "I can make them float! Nobody will get hurt anymore!"

"Watch out!" The man yanked her over, narrowly avoiding Kyuusaku's hand that was about to grab Uraraka from behind. "Don't let Q touch you. Anybody who hurt Q will be infected with the madness."

Midoriya jumped, landing in front of Kyuusaku, who stepped over a body as if they were playing hopscotch. "Why are you doing this?" the green haired teen asked in a strained voice.

"Because they are a threat to Huang Corp."

Ayoyama shrieked as he ducked another attack. "Aren't they supposed to be the good guys? They built this place so everybody can have a better life. You're going to hurt the people you care about too at this rate!"

"Why would they be hurt? Isn't it logical to exterminate the cockroaches trying to invade our home?" Kyuusaku sighed. "God, you're dumber I thought. Who do you think helped me gather all the pests in one place? We cleared out the area just for this. All of these outsiders think they are soooo special. They have a noble cause or they are better somehow with their quirks. Nobody ever notices a little sleeping pill slipped into their drinks. Don't worry, the aunties and uncles are very good at cleaning."

What? Midoriya felt as if he was hit by thunder. Was Kyuusaku suggesting that the people of Suribachi City were in on this? They lured visitors from the outside to death? All of this violence and bloodshed because of what? A difference in ideology? Midoriya didn't know

the extent of what these people were trying to sell the locals of Suribachi but surely it couldn't have warranted death. The friendly faces of shop owners and waitresses flashes across Midoriya's mind. Did they really...how could...no, no, none of that was urgent right now.

"What horrible organization makes kids kill people?" Iida questioned angrily. "This isn't right, Kyuusaku. Stop this. Please."

"Horrible?"

Kyuusaku laughed and it was a sound filled with scorn that shouldn't have originated from such a small body. They jumped out of the way of a man attacking them. With the grace of a cat, they landed on a higher level of stairs with ease.

"Before the age of quirks, the government signed Yokohama away because it was too weak to defend its own lands. Then in order to fund society's *best* interest, Yokohama was sold over and over again or be used as frontlines for never ending wars." Kyuusaku leaned against the metal railing, watching them scramble through the chaos beneath. Akutagawa was trying to kill his way out but Midoriya's classmates were stopping him. It wasn't any time for rules any longer. They had to survive. Oda-san was busy being everywhere at once, yelling at them to retreat and pulling the students out of danger in split seconds.

Midoriya took the chance to catch up to Kyuusaku, determined to not let the child out of his sight again. How could he stop this? Taking the doll didn't work. Did he have to knock Kyuusaku out? But what if this ability went haywire without its owner's conscious control?

Was Kyuusaku even in control of this madness?

"My original parents are outsiders with quirks just like you. The mutation they passed onto me gave me this hair color and eyes. But not all children born of the mutant genes have quirks. I am quirkless by your standards."

Midoriya felt his heart squeezed tight. No. It couldn't be.

"Ever since the day I was born, my ability has already manifested. Do you see the problem? The nurse who pricked me with vaccines. People who pinched my cheeks. Friends who held me a little too strong. They all suffered unexplainable madness." Kyuusaku rocked back and forth on their heels. "So my parents threw me away, ditching me on the outskirts of Yokohama in hopes of being rid of the curse they birthed. They wanted me dead."

His jaw was in pain. Midoriya didn't even notice he was clenching down on his teeth while Kyuusaku was talking.

"Where could a five year old kid go? I tried to ask the heroes for help but the one stationed in that city was a crooked mister. He sold me to Port Mafia. It's too bad he vanished under HPSC's orders a few years back. I would have loved to pay him a visit." Kyuusaku laughed as their head tilted towards the sky. "A hero will save you. Someone else will help you. Good little angel. Be a good little birdy. Not their issue. A hero will handle it."

They pulled up their left sleeve, revealing skin littered with old scars. On their slim arm, there were lines of white slashed all over. The skin was uneven, bumpy and crisscrossed with some squiggly edges overlapping against each other. Old wounds that healed and were cut open again. Sliced open as scabs were still forming. Even now when time had long sealed the wounds shut, Midoriya could see how some dents pressed deeper while other scars landed shallow.

“Port Mafia’s boss was a scary meanie. He taped barb wires and razors underneath my clothing so even the lightest touch from an unsuspecting stranger would activate my ability. But he was scared of me too so he locked me up and I lived. My parents must be so disappointed.”

They moved closer and Midoriya found himself unconsciously taking a step back.

“A monster. A curse. Born to be a villain. I was a weapon here. What life do you think I would have on the outside?”

Shinsou was made fun of. People backed away from him when they learned his quirk could control them. But Shinsou’s quirk could be stopped and it required conscious effort. Kyuusaku on the other hand...Midoriya couldn’t fathom the kind of ostracization that would manifest from ugly fear. Would quirk therapy work? It was an environmental issue. Kyuusaku was a victim. They never got the proper love or protection or guidance they deserved. If only—

No.

Midoriya saw the darkness behind Kyuusaku’s eyes. “What happened to you wasn’t right,” he managed to croak.

“Yes but see, if my parents didn’t throw me away, I wouldn’t have met the hero. If the hero hadn’t sold me, I wouldn’t be with Port Mafia. I want to live. I needed to live in Yokohama. Your society decided that Yokohama was the perfect dumping ground for filth they didn’t want. We are here so you can feel safe and pretend everything is alright. Really—” they smiled brightly as they pointed a finger at Midoriya—“the one who made kids learn how to take a life is you.”

A coldness seeped through Midoriya’s entire body. He felt it in his core, felt the ice driving through the bottom of his feet and icicles spearing into his heart. He had seen evil. Shigaraki was evil. The villain hurt his friends and wanted to kill his idol. Shigaraki hated the world because he wanted to destroy all justice stood for.

Kyuusaku was evil but Midoriya didn’t know how to process the younger child’s resentment. His hate didn’t burn. It was just a bottomless pit where the fall never ended. The shadows swallowed the lights as he fell, descending and descending until there was nothing left.

Somebody reached for the doll in his hand.

“That’s enough.”

Dazai's other hand was on Midoriya's shoulder and the latter felt the energy drained from him. The last warmth from One For All seemed to be snuffed out from his body completely. He felt thirteen again. Before he met All Might in person, before he trained, before he gained a quirk.

Small and voiceless and alone.

"Dazai-san," Kyuusaku yawned. "You always ruin the fun. Is it just you? I guess you don't want to give me more toys to play with and the man tiger must be guarding them right now."

The detective's expression was cold. "I told you before, I sealed you once and I will kill you if there is a next time."

"You won't. I was just exterminating pests in my home. You won't make ADA get on Father's bad side over such a small dispute." The child pulled out another doll from thin air. "And it wasn't me who started the mess. Midoriya Izuku was the one who broke the first Dollie."

Midoriya gasped. The thread that came loose. The tear on the doll. That was what activated the chaos? HE was the one who put his friends in danger?

"What are you even doing with them in the first place?" Dazai pushed the stunned Midoriya back.

"There are too many troublemakers in Suribachi lately that people are upset. I wanted to make them happy so granny and everybody else don't have to worry. The bad guys pestering everybody have to go, the mafia who think they can just come and go as they please should learn a lesson," Kyuusaku chirped as they counted on their fingers, "and I thought I'd find a Mommy but the new faces are all boring and annoying. Nobody in Yokohama likes outsiders anyways. If they make a mistake, they will get kicked out."

"And you decided to force them to use their quirks."

"I can't help it if they are weak." Kyuusaku beamed so bright that it made every single one of Midoriya's classmates shudder.

"We should have killed you years ago," coughed Akutagawa.

"You can still try," Kyuusaku sang, "but I'll break you first. And Dazai-san, please don't move. I'd hate it if I had to set off another gift."

"Another?" Todoroki repeated, breathless as he surveyed the bodies around them. None of the supposed criminals had survived. No one could have survived the madness and if they did, Akutagawa finished his job. Midoriya was too focused on Kyuusaku to see it but he heard the urgent cry of "Tokoyami!"

There was a handprint on Tokoyami's wrist.

"When did this happen?" Tokoyami backed away, holding his other hand up to warn the rest of their classmates to keep their distance. Fear was painted on all of their faces, especially

when Ojirou was still knelt over the ground, throwing up and holding his head. Hagakure was on the ground with him, trying to wipe his tears away.

Dazai wasn't even looking in their direction though. The man was focused on Kyuusaku.

"And you call yourselves heroes," Kyuusaku stuck their tongue out. Their hand was on the doll's head, threatening to unleash another hell.

But they never got the chance.

There was a shift in Dazai's expression, where his brows eased apart ever so slightly as a giant shadow loomed over them all.

"Kyuusaku."

The voice that called the child was low and hoarse, raspy with a bit of sleep as if the person had just risen from a nap. It was monotone and obviously male but the flat tone made Kyuusaku flinch.

Something hooked into the back of Kyuusaku's collar, lifting them into the air and pulling them back. Scales came into view, bone white with the shine of polished porcelain. It was a beast that snatched the nightmare that had tortured and caused a bloodshed. Kyuusaku dangled in the air, feet kicking against empty space and they were so small in comparison.

"Is t-that a d-dragon?" Mineta's teeth chattered as he cowered lower under Shoji's arms.

It was.

Three giant eyes swirling with rings of gold and red glowered down at them. Rows of sharp teeth pressed dangerously close against Kyuusaku's face as hot breath showered them. The dragon snarled, heated vapor escaping its nostrils while Kyuusaku pushed against its snout. Midoriya felt the pressure of its presence from here. Danger stung every pore of his skin sharply. Every instinct he had was telling him to run but his legs were stone, useless as he stared at the sight before him.

There were heroes with dragonic quirks. There were giant villains. But none of them were as intimidating as the beast before them right now. Its body sleek and its claws sharp, the fluidity of its movement told them this thing was real and *alive*. It had a smell to it too, not pungent or foul but raw, the natural scent of a beast bathed in so much blood that no wash could remove the smell.

A young man around Atsushi's age stood at the top of the stairs. The dragon's tail wrapped around him as he rubbed his neck, expression cold as he studied the scene beneath. His hair was crimson like Kirishima's and his eyes shared the same color as the life that drained away on the ground. The man wore a tang suit with the knot buttons loosely clasped. Black and white fabric dressed his body, where an embroidery of gold pattern covered his left shoulder. His pants were black and his boots heavy like the ones issued in the military. Despite his handsome features, the cold boredom on his face made everybody fall into a hushed silence.

They didn't need an introduction to deduce that this was Huang Zeku.

The child prodigy.

The CEO who built a dream.

The Dragon of Suribachi City.

This must be how he gained that name. Midoriya remembered the rumours Dr. Yosano told them too. How the dead clawed back. Squinting, his eyes stung from how Huang Zeku's hair blended into the setting sun. Red as blood. Death followed his every step in the form of wavering shadows casted by the long edge of his tang suit.

The child who had killed so many without blinking an eye gulped with difficulty. They smiled, mustering the sweetest curve and loveliest voice they could as they offered.

"Hey, Dad."

"Dad?" Mina repeated in confusion. He couldn't have been that old. Kyuusaku was too old to be this guy's child.

When the new stranger moved, they saw piercings in his ears and he had a loop of red tassel dangling from his earlobe.

"You were too loud," he complained as he reached out his hand. Kyuusaku timidly gave up their doll, which the guy didn't hesitate to throw at Dazai. The doll vanished upon contact with Dazai.

"Took you long enough," Dazai said. The lightness in his voice returned. "Your ward's been terrorizing poor little babies. They are just young fletchlins and dumb as a brick! What terrible manners!"

"Kyuusaku's thirteen."

"And a menace!"

"Go hang yourself on a tree."

"Did that this morning. Didn't work."

Something about this seemingly casual conversation was terrifying. Maybe it was the dramatic pitch of Dazai's voice that didn't match his calculating gaze. Or maybe it was the insouciance of Huang Zeku's body language even as he saw the aftermath of hell. Something was absolutely wrong with the relaxed attitude around suicide.

Huang Zeku yawned, glancing down at Akutagawa with a shake of his head. "Leave. Your subordinates by the gates too."

Akutagawa clacked his tongue but he didn't argue. The man vanished from his spot in an instant but not before he sent Kyuusaku a nasty glare. The child hissed back at him. However,

their expression quickly changed back to a look of cute innocence when the dragon dropped them.

“I didn’t do any—okay, so maybe I did a little something.” Kyuusaku shrunk a bit smaller as they tugged on the older male’s sleeve. “But they fell for it. I didn’t even try that hard. So many clues too! I don’t know how I can dumb it down further for them. I swear! Don’t get mad at me, Dad.”

“Why do they keep calling him that?” Jirou asked Oda-san hesitantly.

“Because he’s my dad.” It was Kyuusaku who answered, voice hard as if offended. The look they gave Jirou was one straight from a horror movie, where people’s spines would quiver for a long while after every time night fell. Jirou clenched onto Kaminari, who stood rigidly but stubbornly in front of her. “I said he is so he is.”

Not the parents who abandoned them. Not the hero who betrayed them. Not the mafia who used them.

Midoriya was sure Kyuusaku would claw their throats out if anybody continued to question their logic.

“Well, it’s been an exciting day. We have to go. Their teacher must be worried and it’s almost dinner time.” Dazai pushed Midoriya towards Todoroki while Oda-san picked up Ojirou in a fireman’s lift.

They moved towards the other side of the street but soon, everybody stopped dead in their tracks as the dragon slithered over to block their path. Its giant body tightened around their group, encircling them.

Its nails tapped along the concrete, chipping small dents as easy as a knife through butter. Midoriya saw its long tongue slip out, thick and muscular while coated in saliva. All of its eyes were focused on them. It was close now, close enough that the first in their groups could be reflected in its eyes, their bodies small and blurry in the pond of inhuman colors.

“This thing looks hungry...” someone whispered in a pinched voice.

Dazai looked back. “What’s the meaning of this?”

“They broke the rules.” There was a lethargic air to the way Huang Zeku talked. His voice was smooth and he dragged his words a bit in a mocking way.

“That’s why we’re getting out of your hair now. You can go back to being creepy and broody all you want.”

The dragon let out a low growl, inching closer that forced everybody back into a tighter group.

“Not quite.” A grin stretched across Huang Zeku’s lips but it was a joyless one. When he talked, it felt as if he was biting into their necks, draining the blood from their veins with the sharp edge of his canines. There was malicious bloodlust behind that smile and he wasn’t

hiding it. His face wasn't ugly or scary but the way he looked at them filled them with unease, turning their stomachs in anxiousness because...because...Midoriya didn't know how to say this.

Because it felt as if he was looking at a dead slab of meat.

They weren't human in his eyes.

It was revolting.

“Dad?” Kyuusaku was also confused.

“Come,” he ordered. There was a second where Midoriya thought he saw Huang Zeku’s pupils constricting into a thin line, excited as a predator's would before a hunt. “It’s been a while since I’ve had...*guests*.”

With the dragon watching their every move, he might as well have announced Class A was dinner.

Chapter End Notes

happy happy dance

This chapter is done and Zeku is out!

Thank you for all the kudos/comments/bookmarks! In the original coiled dragon, q didn't make an appearance because zeku and katsuki didn't think it'd be good to add them to the mess. They were already dealing with too much to process so q got to stay in and not play with the hero kida

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Mention of drug use without knowledge

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

1

The way Dr. Yosano shopped should not be legal.

Aizawa padded after the woman like a pack mule as he tried to balance the weight of half a dozen large shopping bags. After Vlad and the students left, he agreed to accompany her for a short walk in hopes of gleaming more information about Yokohama.

The little walk turned into a bargain haul at the local market.

“Thank you for helping out. Usually Kenji comes with me to restock the agency’s inventory but he’s busy with a case.” Dr. Yosano smiled at him. Her dark hair was straightened neatly into a bob, with a bit of the longer portions pinned away from her eyes with a bronze butterfly clip. There was always a warm shine behind her magenta eyes too. A matching shade of gloss also painted her lips. She had a bag about the length of a tennis racket but the shape was odd and she wasn’t dressed for sports. Aizawa had no idea how she could shop like she did in heels either. His feet were already killing him and he had runners.

“It’s no problem.” He ignored the soreness spreading in his arms. The plastic strings of the bags dug into him as the weight swayed.

Yokohama was still quiet today. It lacked the vibrant colors and bustling noise of the outside that Aizawa was used to. While occasionally, he heard firetrucks and police cruisers speeding past, Yokohama was calm.

The serenity was ominous like the calm before a storm.

The feeling condensed in his bones, causing a dull ache. Even from here, he could see the edges of Port Mafia’s five towers. The criminals were flaunting their powers in the world’s face. So far, this field trip had been so uneventful that Aizawa couldn’t infer or deduce any possible motive behind why the villains were willing to orchestrate a field trip for UA.

Also, something had been bothering him since they entered Yokohama. The soldiers at the entrance were checking people going in and not out. Occasionally, they stopped certain cars that were leaving to inspect them but most of the soldiers were facing the outside. Not in.

Almost as if their instruction was to keep people out of Yokohama and not the other way around like HPSC had told Nedzu. The government was working with the heroes to protect the world from the dangerous ability users. The check points were supposed to keep villains within the boundaries of one city so they couldn't spread terror to other corners of society. Yokohama's government might have operated like a self-governing state but they were still part of Japan.

But what if even the soldiers weren't on their side?

Aizawa had faith in his class. The teens that came under his care this year were prone to trouble but Aizawa knew they had potential. Young and inexperienced? Yes. Of course. But it was the teacher's job to polish and sharpen the diamonds in the rough. Being a hero was difficult work and many of their milestones would be built upon sweat and blood.

Except that, Yokohama shouldn't be one of them.

It was too early.

As seasoned as Aizawa, even he didn't know what to make of the underlying hostility in Yokohama. No matter how friendly the locals were, it was clear none of them trusted anybody associated with heroes. Normally that wouldn't bother Aizawa but it was strange considering how the same wariness transpired between both sides of the law.

Yokohama was a baffling city and Aizawa knew he wasn't getting any answers soon.

All he could do right now was note down the important infrastructures mentally. Police stations, fire houses, hospitals...he tried to engrave as much of this city's blueprint in his head. This might be helpful to Principal Nedzu later on, if there ever was a need for heroes to move into Yokohama. Maybe they would find a way to take down Port Mafia completely.

But at that point, was it a raid on villains or would it be war?

War. The little voice echoed in the back of his mind. Most of his career, Aizawa had been told Yokohama was under the control of evil. Every hero dreamed of saving the citizens of Yokohama when they first learned of Port Mafia's existence. It would be the same inspiring story as countless other cases were before. The heroes would save the day. Defeat the bad guys and free the innocent.

From what?

Aizawa wasn't sure now as he stared at the peaceful street.

So he studied, watching the city and its people, trying to find a glint of answers.

What was truly important in battle was Port Mafia's five towers. However, Aizawa couldn't find the time or opportunity to infiltrate the place. By day, the detectives kept watch over them and at night, Aizawa always seemed to have the unfortunate luck of running into the young staff whenever he tried to sneak away.

The girl would watch him with her large bambi eyes and timid little smiles.

But Aizawa wouldn't be so easily fooled.

Her hands were rough but not from hard work. The calluses were similar to those found on Fukuzawa's hands, evidence of training with blades. She was a swordsman just like him and from the thickness of the calluses, this girl had years of battle experience already too.

Aizawa saw the tension in her stance, the lightness of her feet, and the swiftness behind her every move.

This girl was here to watch them, keeping them in check as shepherds would with their cows. He wasn't sure who sent her but he didn't want to rock the boat. In reality, it didn't quite matter anyway. Port Mafia. ADA. Somebody else. Aizawa doubted that ADA would be willing to help the heroes if they ever wanted to make a move against Port Mafia.

"Aren't you the hero Eraserhead?" A man walked up to him. He was around his early twenties with white hair that was red at the tips. The red and white hair reminded Aizawa of Todoroki but they shared no other familial features. His eyes were closed but he was moving around without any issue.

His clothing—a plain black cardigan over a T-shirt and white trousers—provided no clue to what occupation he held. However, Aizawa noticed the man's straight back and even gait. It made Aizawa immediately defensive and wary.

He was an underground hero who kept a low profile. Even on the outside, it was rare for reporters to recognize him upon first glance. Now, out of his gears and dressed up properly in a city without heroes, how could a random citizen recognize him with such confidence?

"I am." There was no point concealing his identity. Aizawa was also curious about what this man wanted with him.

"The name's Jouno Saigiku." The man didn't hold out a hand for Aizawa to shake but there was a slyness behind his smile that made Aizawa uncomfortable. "How are you finding Yokohama, Mr. Hero?"

Definitely hostile.

The politeness of Jouno's tone couldn't hide the contempt behind his words. It was as if the word "hero" was associated with an ignominious connotation.

Dr. Yosano moved between them.

"What is the military police doing here?" the doctor asked flatly.

Military Police?

"Don't be so alarmed. We have vacation days too."

We?

Aizawa looked behind Jouno, seeing another more familiar face emerge from the shop across the street. The soldier with messy brown hair with the three markings under his left eye spotted them and came over. Suehiro, Aizawa remembered Kunikida calling him that, stood beside Jouno as nodded at Dr. Yosano and Aizawa.

“Good day,” he greeted in a serious tone. Out of his red uniform, the man was in simple gym clothing and he was carrying a bag of sports drinks as if he was on his way to a workout. “Is it just one teacher here?”

He was asking Dr. Yosano. Aizawa didn’t like this. Their attention skipped him even though he was standing right here.

Also, Aizawa remembered where he had heard of the red uniforms before. While there were heroes and police, plenty of countries around the globe still kept active military forces. It was necessary, especially for national emergencies like natural disasters. Most of them don’t engage in actual warfare with other countries or actively pursue international criminals.

But the Hunting Dogs were different.

It was a troop composed of formidable ability users that started long ago, back before quirks came into the picture. Aizawa heard their training was a different level of hell that even HPSC couldn’t replicate and the selected individuals were nicknamed “Mad Dogs”. Ruthless and relentless, the Hunting Dogs would stop at nothing to complete their mission.

Unlike the heroes, they had authority to execute their enemies on the spot too.

Japan deployed this special force to help suppress quirk or ability rampages around the world. The red of their uniform was rumored to be the flash of the reaper’s scythe from hell on the battlefield. But most of the heroes had just heard of the Hunting Dog’s existence unless they specialized in warzone rescue or international crime.

It was the first time Aizawa saw one of them in person too.

“The kids and the other pro are with my colleagues.” Dr. Yosano turned towards Aizawa, urging him to leave with her instead of engaging in small talk. “Now, if you will excuse us, we need to get going.”

Jouno didn’t stop them. He even stepped aside with a nod, showing that he was fully aware of his surroundings even without his sight. “We’re not going to arrest anybody for no reason. It’s been a while since I’ve encountered a hero. I was quite surprised that any of them would actually have the courage to show their faces in Yokohama after what happened with HPSC. That’s all.”

Aizawa knew it was bait but he still asked, “What happened with HPSC?”

He hadn’t seen any news relating to the Commission. While Aizawa wasn’t a big fan of the Commission, if something did happen to the organization, it might cause trouble for Aizawa’s work.

The two soldiers and Dr. Yosano paused, seeming taken aback by Aizawa's question.

"You don't know?" Dr. Yosano frowned.

"Know what?" Aizawa was losing patience but he had a bad feeling about this.

Jouno shook his head in disbelief. "Aren't you in your thirties? UA's OB debuted as pro around eighteen to nineteen...so you've got around twelve years on the job. HPSC must be really good at keeping secrets. Or you've just been living under a rock."

Before Aizawa fully snapped, Suehiro sighed. For some reason, he was sitting in an air chair, doing muscle training while he explained, "About four years back, HPSC proposed a law to strip the military police of our authority to arrest criminals and our captain's right to refuse participation in missions assigned by HPSC. They suggested that we were to be accompanied by a licensed hero at all times. Essentially, our existence would be the same as a registered gun under a selected few heroes' agencies."

Aizawa had never heard of that proposal before.

"Technically, we're quirkless and to become a Hunting Dog, every candidate has to receive body modification surgeries to enhance our natural senses and stamina." The shadow of a smile on Jouno's face only made his words more chilling. "The maintenance and other expenses are covered by the government, which HPSC used to argue that we're public property and should be treated as lethal goods, not heroes. Instead of decorated soldiers, we were argued to be equipment."

"That's—" A horror story. It couldn't be true. That was what Aizawa would have argued if he was ten years younger. HPSC wasn't as clean as their name sparkled under the media spotlight. However, he couldn't believe they would go to such extremes.

Jouno closed in before Aizawa could complete his sentence. There was no hesitation to his movement. Too quick and decisive to be a coincidence. He might be blind but he had captured Aizawa's reactions well up to this point, navigating around without a cane or aid. A quirk? An added feature given to him through surgery?

The thought of surgically enhancing people also didn't sit well with Aizawa. People weren't composed of parts that anybody could just replace with something else. A healthy limb wasn't software that needed to be upgraded every few months. Even if the person being tested on consented, how far was too far before people stopped being people?

What was the difference between them and villains if everything could be discarded in the pursuit for power?

"Heroes are the pillars of society. Nothing will ever get done without them. You have your superpowers and special equipment, plus a pearl white smile. That is all society needs to maintain order. Everybody else is redundant and outdated. Why care about the past at all when there's a brighter future ahead?"

A pressure weighed down upon Aizawa's shoulders. Heavy and familiar, it was the same bloodlust that he had seen in serial killers before. Aizawa had his share of dealing with hardened criminals and tough fighters but the Hunting Dogs truly lived up to their name. Without a doubt, the man before him was one who walked through countless battlefields, clawing his way out on a path of blood and bones.

Jouno opened his eyes. Hazy with a foggy gray, the dullness told of complete blindness.

"Do you know how it feels to be labeled a defect by those you protect?"

Aizawa has been called many things. The criminals he chased or apprehended in the past had called him every degrading term possible in the dictionary. Sometimes, random people commented on his disheveled and unkempt style in snide remarks. Saving people wasn't always met with gratitude either. He certainly had families or victims snarling swear words at him before.

Did any of that matter though? If he was the military police, it probably wouldn't. They could spend hours arguing who had it harder or how deeply sorry Aizawa was for HPSC's behavior. It wouldn't change what was done and to be honest, one hero's opinion didn't mean much in political games.

Unless he was All Might.

"Fun. Isn't it? The war barely ended over a decade ago and here we are."

"Japan hasn't been at war in a long time." Ever since All Might's debut, the criminals all scurried and because of the No.1 hero's charm, foreign negotiations had been smooth. Everybody was too focused on strengthening their own countries too through reform of laws and medication advancements for quirks.

"No. *Heroes* haven't been at war in a long time. Heroes subdue villains. You don't take lives and it's not great publicity to have the likes of Best Jeanist known to be a killer. Bad press is horrible for business and the age of peace doesn't need wars. Quirks are also not as efficient in slaughter when they have physical limitations. It takes a lot more resources to custom fit all of you with equipment too. Now, the quirkless don't have that issue. Easy to standardize. Easy to recruit." Jouno shrugged, backing away from Aizawa but the heaviness in the air remained. "Isn't that right, Yosano Akiko? How old were you when you were on the battlefield? Eight? Twelve?"

Aizawa's head snapped up. His gaze flickered between the detective and the two soldiers. Although Jouno's words were brief, the amount of information his few sentences contained was nearly enough to short circuit his brain. Surely Jouno couldn't have meant what Aizawa thought he was implying!

If Japan was indeed involved in war, there surely would be word of it floating around. They were pro heroes. If anybody would have access to that information or caught wind of it, it would be them. Besides, Jouno made no sense. There were heroes involved in war. America and the EU often deployed their own heroes to other countries for war zone aides.

Humanitarian aides.

Not in battle. Never in battle.

They saved people. They treated wounds. They repaired the damage.

He watched Dr. Yosano, trying to find a trace of laughter or any other evidence to back up the absurdity of Jouno's claim.

Dr. Yosano's grip on her bag strap tightened. "That's none of your business," she said, her tone dripping in venom. "What are you trying to achieve here? He's just a teacher. If you're looking for empathy or repentment, you're barking up the wrong tree."

"I'm not looking for sympathy or apologies." Jouno took another step back, silently bumping Suehiro back as well. Aizawa noticed how Suehiro instinctively reached for his side as if looking for a sword in anticipation of a fight. "There's a price to be paid for justice and the Hunting Dogs exist to protect order. My personal opinions won't affect my work. I'm even being nice and saving him the trouble of having to snoop around."

"I don't know what you mean," Aizawa denied with a small frown.

"You were ordered to gather information on Yokohama's terrain." Jouno pointed to the side of his temple. Smiling easily, he ignored Suehiro's tap on his shoulder. "There's no need to deny it. It's the order we would have gotten if we were in your shoes. If you want, you can just go buy a copy of Yokohama's map from any convenience store. It'll save you a lot of trouble. Ah, and now you're thinking there must be a trap. Why would Port Mafia allow a map of their city to be so easily accessible?"

There it was again. Aizawa felt naked even if sweat clung to his skin like a second layer of clothing. From the detectives to the military police, all of them seemed to be able to read others like an open book. There were no secrets they couldn't uncover, no lies they couldn't see through, and every piece of dirt that was buried deep in everybody could be laid out under the sun with the wrong turn of a conversation.

"Because they don't care. They don't think it matters," Aizawa found himself answering in an even voice. "They are confident that they will still have the upperhand."

"Correct."

"Why?"

"You will understand if you saw an ability that specializes on the offense."

The hero remained calm on the surface but he was still ruminating over what Jouno had said, Aizawa remembered the soldiers he had seen at Yokohama's entrance.

Easy to standardize.

None of them had obvious physical mutations. They were plain and simple: Two arms and two legs, a mouth and nose with two eyes, roughly the same build of body shape, and no

additional special accommodations or dietary needs (like diesel or glass, as some of Aizawa's past associates needed to consume).

Easy to recruit.

Aizawa wasn't a specialist but he had worked cases of discrimination before. Children told how they were worthless because they were born without a gift. Teenagers slowly distancing themselves from pity and looking for belonging. The adults who were at a disadvantage in the job market because they didn't have the right quirk. Not enough. Too bland. Weaker. Stupider. Troublemakers. Loners. Didn't fit in.

Different.

Dr. Yosano's phone went off and it was a quick call. Aizawa couldn't hear what the person on the other side said. All he knew was there was a shift of Dr. Yosano's expression. Her smile was wiped and for a second, she was unrecognizable. Her face was still the same but the look behind her eyes was one of dark violence.

"We have to go," she said curtly as she grabbed Aizawa, taking some of the bags from him in a hurry. There was no strain in her expression or body despite the added weight. "Now. Aizawa-san."

She pulled him into a sprint without saying another word and the only thought that passed through Aizawa's head was that this woman was strong.

Her grip was like iron around his wrist.

"What is going on?" he questioned.

"It's your class," Dr. Yosano hissed back. "They broke the rules."

"Do you have to mentally torture everybody you talk to?" Suehiro took out a bottle of sports drink while he watched Yosano and Aizawa disappear down the street. His colleague smiled, turning around to continue his stroll through the park.

"I barely got started."

"It's rare to see you so worked up. He's not a criminal."

"That's part of the problem. He knows nothing. That's even worse when they know something."

"You shouldn't have taken out your anger on him."

"I'm not mad." Jouno elbowed Suehiro in the ribs. "I'm annoyed. They erase our work like it's nothing because we don't have a cheer squad following us around. Somehow, those idiots in HPSC think that Captain's less than All Might because he's not on camera all the time."

He's unworthy to be called a hero because he's just a soldier. Yet, they'd hand out a license and title to random grubs who can puke rainbows out of their eyelashes."

Their captain had been in the military for decades, spending nearly half of his life on battlefields for Japan. Blood rained throughout his prime years and even now, he led the Hunting Dogs to chase criminals ferociously. The man didn't mind how All Might had gotten all the attention and society's gratitude. However, the Captain was furious at the outside government's attempt to classify his soldiers into machines. He was an ability user himself.

Hunting Dogs do not falter. Hunting Dogs do not betray. They were here to maintain order no matter the cost.

But they won't be used to create a brand of justice that would harm the innocent.

Suehiro nodded. "Why did they run off in a hurry?"

He knew Jouno's ears would have caught whatever conversation that was made on the phone. After all, Jouno had the best hearing in the squad even if all of them had physical enhancements.

"Huang Zeku invited the UA students to dinner."

"...Do you mean *'having* them for dinner'? He eats weird stuff." Suehiro wiped his mouth with the back of his hand before capping his drink back into the bag.

While Jouno wouldn't be surprised if Huang shared the same menu as his dragon, he didn't think his colleague had any right to comment. Suehiro would eat boiled eggs with the shell on and drench chocolate in soy sauce. Unless eating Suehiro's cooking was the only way to stop world destruction, Jouno never wanted to be in the same room as any food that Suehiro prepared.

"We should report back to the Captain," suggested Suehiro while pulling out his phone. "The hero students aren't going to last long under Huang."

None of the Hunting Dogs liked the owner of Huang Corp much. If they could actually charge him, the young adult would have a rap sheet that would terrify most criminals and put serial killers to shame. It was only due to his immense contribution to the city and an under the table deal with the government that he escaped prison time.

The Hunting Dogs tried to recruit him before but it didn't end well. Huang Zeku wasn't one to take orders and the government suspected that his powers might have originated from human experimentation. Otherwise, it was hard to explain how a child had extensive knowledge in the field. They never managed to find any evidence to support the claim though, despite how familiar the Hunting Dogs were with such a topic.

Hunting Dogs do not betray.

They couldn't when their bodies required specialized maintenance at least once a month. If they missed even one session, their bodies would crumble apart in an agonizing death.

A few minutes later, Suehiro looked down at his phone. “Captain said to leave it. We don’t have to get involved.”

That was expected. Although none of them loved the idea of working with the other organizations within Yokohama, they didn’t want heroes digging into their business either. “He has a penchant for violence, is capriciously cruel and vindictive, with a disdain towards most living organisms too—”

Suehiro faked a cough behind a half-snicker. “Are you talking about yourself?”

Jouno slapped Suehiro on the back of his head. “Point is, Huang knows what he’s doing. He would have been dead a long time ago if he didn’t know where the lines were.”

“Maybe *he* does. I’m not so sure about the hero kids.”

“That’s ADA’s problem.” It was a bunch of teenagers, not actual terrorists who needed to be beaten to an inch away from death. “Besides, we have other issues to take care of. There’s a lead on the connection to the corpse trafficking ring. We might be able to catch their buyer so the Vice Captain’s eager on getting permission.”

“Are we leaving Yokohama then?” Since Yokohama had a larger population of ability users, they often found themselves stationed here but it wasn’t uncommon for the Hunting Dogs to travel for missions.

“The order should be coming soon. Vice Captain is waiting for the paperwork to be finalized.” Unlike being deployed overseas for emergencies, investigations around Japan had to have the HPSC and local police’s permission. They didn’t want to be mistaken for villains by the heroes during a pursuit.

If they were lucky though, they’d be able to squeeze in some time to hunt down villains on the most wanted list. Now that would be much more entertaining than watching teenagers make a fool of themselves.

2

Patrol did show up but they might as well not have. Huang Corp’s private security—each who rivaled Endeavor in physique—sandwiched them in two files until they arrived at a restaurant.

It was a fancy place with koi ponds and a well-maintained garden that reminded Todoroki of a few business dinners that Endeavor took him to in the past. Pines and bonsai over gray stones, the greens bloomed even more magnificent than summer roses. From the outside, the high stone fences blocked off the view from the street, giving the customers a sense of privacy.

But now, they served as walls of a trap that was quickly caging them all in.

Todoroki glanced behind him, watching the solemn faces of his peers as the road they came from vanished in the blur of orange setting sun. As the shadow on his classmates’ faces

bleached into the night, the lanterns on the side of the cobblestone road lit up. Dimmer but still warm, the lights reminded him of a gathering of fireflies.

Those fireflies wouldn't be as scared as they were now though.

The dragon had vanished during a slip of inattention. It didn't disappear. It didn't turn into a puff of smoke or return to its owner. It was just...gone one second. However, Todoroki could feel the apprehension in the air. The tension hung thick too, almost forming a concrete lump in the back of their throats judging by how a few of his classmates gulped with difficulty. None of them were crying or shaking but he could guess from the twitch of fingers and shifting eyes that they were all thinking.

What was the purpose of this dinner?

There was no way Huang Zeku was just being nice and treating them to dinner. Was there an ambush waiting for them inside the restaurant? No. If he wanted to kill them, his giant dragon would have mauled them in the secluded streets. Kyuusaku appeared done with them though, muttering about how they were no fun and couldn't take a joke all the way here. A *joke*. The child treated causing mass hysteria and almost killing them the same as an innocent prank of hiding a shoe. The complete disregard they had towards life in general was nearly infuriating but also chilling. How could someone so young lack empathy to the point where violence and death was their entertainment?

Also, what was with that ability? Todoroki had never heard of a brainwashing quirk as powerful before. Quirks that influenced another person's psyche were rare already and they often came with heavy restrictions, like could only control one person at a time or it was just a light hypnosis that could be broken easily with physical stimulation. Yet, the people Kyuusaku controlled had absolutely no hesitation about hurting themselves or others. They didn't even need to maintain contact with them to keep the influence strong.

Keep calm. A hero needed to keep calm to assess their situation rationally. Endeavor drilled the lessons into Todoroki a long time ago. He needed to reassess the information he had.

Kyuusaku's doll vanished when Dazai touched it. The man must have some nullifying ability as Todoroki and Midoriya suspected that worked through contact.

Rashomon. Akutagawa repeated that word before his attack turned more vicious. It appeared like he had control over the fabric of his clothing like Best Jeanist. Was it voice command-activated then? But that didn't explain how his attack was able to drill underground. Controlling fabric and enhancing it should be two different powers. Also, there was a red glow when he used his powers. Maybe it wasn't fabric that Akutagawa was controlling?

The dragon had its own will. It moved without much obvious effort from its owner's part and it wasn't attached to a human host. How did that work? Tokoyami was physically linked to Dark Shadow and other heroes with reptilian quirks transformed themselves, not manifesting an entire organism out of will. None of these powers so far adhered to any logic or laws of physics.

No wonder the detectives stressed that abilities were different from quirks.

So how could they beat them?

Todoroki looked ahead. They had passed through a hall and into the restaurant, where only one giant round table was set out in the middle of the private room. In line with the rest of Suribachi, it was a more Chinese set up. Carved wooden pillars raised the ceiling higher than normal and a wooden lotus bloomed upon the ceiling, where the light was at the center of the layers of petals.

Kyuusaku and Huang Zeku took a seat while the rest of them slowly followed when Dazai and Oda both sat down too. The adults took the spots closest to the Huangs but the division between them was still distinct as if there was an invisible barrier between them.

Food was served. Waitresses in green brought out plates of food for them. Todoroki smelled roasted pork amongst the incoming savory haven but he was too distracted to look at the food properly.

The owner of Huang Corp wasn't as large as All Might or ugly as a monster in horror movies. If they were judging by appearance alone, Huang Zeku might have been no different than a senpai that Todoroki would cross paths with in school. But Huang Zeku wasn't. It wasn't even about the dragon.

It was because of his eyes.

Todoroki was familiar with people's eyes. Curiosity prickled when people's gazes lingered on his scar for too long. Sometimes people had a longing behind dreamy looks that he was told because they loved him (like their girl who gave him a love letter in Junior High). There was passion behind his father's heated stare as he beated and trained Todoroki. The man wasn't looking at a son but at a masterpiece in the making. Judgment from strangers trying to assess if he was fitted of the No.2 hero's blood. Disgust from criminals. Fear. Envy. Flickering gazes from his siblings because there was nothing to be said or they didn't know what to say. Stain's eyes held a hint of approval when they fought in the alley.

He couldn't find anything on Huang Zeku, not even a trace of the same annoyance that Mafia had towards outsiders.

It felt as if none of Todoroki and his classmates were any different from a street lamp in Huang Zeku's eyes.

What could he possibly want then?

Food had piled the table, enough to feed everybody happily but no one dared to touch anything. Was it poisoned? They couldn't be sure. Also, while they were facing each other, the way everybody was seated made it difficult to whisper to each other or pass information along. They didn't know if there were cameras watching them from behind either.

"Eat," Huang Zeku said. The red of his hair was different from Endeavor's shorter hair but spiteful all the same. Todoroki saw the same coldness behind the passionate color. Was it a common problem amongst those of higher standing? There was a total disregard of others that Todoroki never wanted to replicate in himself.

Huang Zeku's voice wasn't loud but it was the only sound in the dead silence. Kyuusaku dug into their food, eating quietly. Still, no one else moved.

"I said *eat*."

That was an order.

A shiver traveled down to the tip of Todoroki's fingers and he felt compelled to sit straighter. He knew this feeling. It was the same terror he felt when they faced Stain, the same kind of stupor that possessed him when he was young and watched his father slap his mother.

But he wasn't a child any more and how could he be a hero if he couldn't overcome his fears?

Some of his classmates raised a spoonful of fried rice to their mouths. The spoon was shaking, spilling about half the food back into their bowls before the rice even touched their lips. Others shoved a piece of vegetable in and swallowed quickly, skipping the need to chew all together as if they were ingesting poison that they were going to puke out later.

"What do you want from us?" Kirishima asked. His question stirred the rest of the class.

"What's going to happen to the...bodies?"

"Why are we here?"

"Let us go!"

They shouted, yelled, and screamed but Huang Zeku barely budged. He only watched as the chaos died down with a face of frost that was even colder than Todoroki's ice. Without any better options or even a non-verbal response to guess what Huang Zeku was thinking, the students settled back down to eat. It was the most uncomfortable meal they ever had even if the food looked like they should taste fantastic. Everything that touched Todoroki's tongue tastes like wax. There was no difference between the chicken or the fish since he was too on the edge. It must be the same for his friends because everybody was chewing with difficulty.

They ate until they were uncomfortably full, the food piling in their stomachs like heated stones while their heads were dizzy.

The more they ate, the more it felt like a last supper. The kind that animals received to fatten them up before a slaughter.

Kyuusaku chuckled, delightfully enjoying their meal while the rest of them glared at them. "No wonder you need the ADA to be full time babysitters at your side. With that tone, you'd be dead within an hour in the wrong parts of Yokohama. Smile a little, won't you? Can't you at least pretend for survival?"

"They are only first years," Oda replied carefully.

"Is that any excuse to talk tough when they don't know who they are speaking to? When there are obviously people who know the situation better, detectives whom they were told

explicitly to allow to handle dangerous affairs present?”

Todoroki found the sweet tone Kyuusaku used unnerving. How much of the class’s current predicament was due to Kyuusaku’s plans? Their encounter, the orphanage, the cell tower... were all of it a part of the plans?

He remembered Iida had a phone from ADA. It hadn’t worked in the streets when they first got lost either. Kyuusaku must have already been targeting them back then.

“Impatient, too naive, and too weak!” The conclusion from the child was a hammer nailing knives into their backs. “You’re no different than the other cockroaches that keep trying to sneak in.”

Sighing, Dazai leaned back into his chair. The man looked at Huang Zeku directly. “Why are you doing this?”

The owner of Huang Corp hadn’t said much. He was watching them, looking bored despite being the one who forced them here. Uncaring of the awkwardness or the clamor, he ate his dinner slowly.

When he heard the question, he set his chopsticks down.

“Aren’t you hungry?” He leaned his head on his hand. His eyes contained no emotion despite how the edge of his lips curled into a smile. “Coiled Dragon certainly is peckish.”

The musk was what hit them all first. It wasn’t a foul scent but it was heavy and raw as it accompanied the shadow that fell over their heads. Long shadows curled over the table as the beast perched its heavy body along edges of wood. It climbed and coiled around the pillars as if the entire room was a playground. Todoroki noticed the pieces of metal embedded within the wood then. Hard steel acted as a scratchboard and the noise made Jirou shrink into her chair, grimacing painfully.

The dragon’s head hovered over Huang Zeku.

“Shinsou! Kacchan!”

Midoriya’s urgent scream was accompanied by shadows dropping over them. A body rolled off the dragon’s claw. White fabric dangled off a piece of scale and the dragon shook the teen off itself. Shinsou landed on the ground roughly, groaning as he stirred to consciousness. Being the closest, Shoji was up from his chair in an instant and helped a gurgly Shinsou away from danger. Meanwhile, the dragon had Bakugou in its other claws. The blond’s eyes were closed and his hand slacked, slipping out between two sharp talons.

Unconscious.

The dragon licked Bakugou’s cheek, leaving a thin layer of wet shine over pale skin. Todoroki saw bumps along the thicker part of the dragon’s tongue, like the spikes on a cat’s. With one lick, a hue of light pink spread upon Bakugou’s skin.

“Let go of Bakugou!” Kirishima yelled.

“What happened to Class B?”

Shinsou groaned against Shoji as he tried to hold himself steady. “Vlad-sensei...behind you...”

He fell forward again, weak and out of it.

Something clattered to the ground. Tea spilled over the table and a chair tilted over. Oda’s hand was on Midoriya’s back, grabbing the green haired teen tightly. Todoroki was half way out of his chair too but he stopped when he noticed Huang Zeku’s smile.

His skin was pale and his teeth sharp. When his lips parted, the edge of his tongue was a red that was too bright and inhuman. Kyuusaku clapped excitedly. The child with a lovely smile and the older man dressed like a piece of history sat relaxed as a monster growled behind them.

Todoroki’s hand tightened into a fist on the table. “You think this is funny?”

“Of course.” Huang Zeku picked up a cup of tea. “Only fools would act out despite knowing they are at a disadvantage. I see no difference between you heroes and clowns.”

Sero and Hagukure made a strangled noise when the dragon used its other claw to force them back. They must have tried to sneak over in hopes of getting Bakugou back quietly during a slip of attention. The dragon had three eyes but they all noticed how it wasn’t looking at Bakugou all the time. It was hungry for them instead.

“Such a rude way of inviting guests,” Dazai said. His voice was soft as a whisper and he didn’t seem particularly concerned or in a hurry to get Bakugou away from danger. “This is why nobody invites you to their parties. Where’s Atsushi?”

“I let the other class go. It’s difficult for the Man Tiger to protect a group this large alone and I only needed this set anyway. The discourse that had all the outsiders losing their heads...it was about this class, wasn’t it? Such resilience to have survived the villain encounter.”

Despite his words, it was obvious he didn’t mean for any of it to be a compliment. The way he pronounced “villain” was more of a scoff than with any hints of caution that normal people have when they talk about criminals.

Huang Zeku didn’t think the League of Villains was a threat.

In fact, during his days in this city, nobody in Yokohama seemed to think so. The civilians barely cared about what was going on with the heroes either, talking about how it must be a pain in the butt with all the *Costumes* jamming up traffic.

The dragon made a rumbling noise in the back of its throat as it lifted Bakugou to eye level. It shook the blond slightly and snorted as if it was entertained by pawing its prey, like a cat would with mice.

Todoroki wondered if his ice would reach Bakugou fast enough. Maybe if they attacked the owner, the dragon would hesitate. But what about Kyuusaku? The mark on Ojirou and

Tokoyami had vanished but was the effect of the child's ability gone or was it just dormant?

His friends might get hurt if any of them acted rashly.

"I'm disappointed," Huang Zeku continued. "Whatever UA has been teaching them clearly isn't enough. Even disregarding the over reliance on quirks and their lack of physical training, they don't even know how to shut up. But I guess that is the consequence when all the heroes know how to do is talk and steamroll their way to what they want. Negotiations have never been their strong suit. Ideology is."

"What is it that you want then?" Dazai asked. He picked up a crab cake and twirled a piece of it at the end of his chopsticks. "This is a lot of trouble just to belittle them. You hate crowds and talking."

Huang Zeku waved his hand and his dragon lowered Bakugou. However, the beast still had the teen trapped within its grasp. His eyes lingered on Bakugou's sleeping face for a second before flickering over to the rest of the students. "Somebody stole Coiled Dragon's dragon pearl. I'm busy and since Port Mafia insists that Yokohama entertain outsiders who are in over their heads, I thought we'd play a game."

"A game?" repeated Midoriya doubtfully. His attention was glued to Bakugou and the dragon like Mina's. All of them were scared that the dragon might accidentally squeeze too tight or nick the blond in the neck with the sharp edge of its long claws.

"You've learned from the best detectives there are. If there's actually any potential merit to you heroes then solve this case for me." Huang Zeku hummed. Shadows fell over his features as he leaned forward, the red of his eyes dangerous with a hint of wickedness as he announced, "Find the dragon pearl and I will give you back your friend."

There was no threat or even a creepy "or else". However, the dragon hissed. Its long body slithering along the room. A part of its hard scales even brushed by Uraraka's ankle and the girl immediately moved out of the way.

Todoroki felt as if the dragon was wrapping around his throat, strangling him. Huang Zeku's fingers landed on Bakugou's neck, tapping lightly but there was no doubt that one wrong breath and he would snap a life.

"You have until the end of your field trip to solve this on your own."

At that, Huang Zeku left with Kyuusaku, not even bothering to explain any further. The dragon followed, slipping out of the room while Bakugou was tossed to a waiting security guard who transported the teen like a sack of rice behind his employer. A woman dressed like a secretary appeared when Kirishima wanted to give chase. Her dark hair was long and straight and she resembled the traditional dolls that Todoroki's mom used to display during Hinamatsuri.

"Zeku-sama is a very busy man. All you need is in here," she said with a sharp smile as her tight hold on Kirishima pinned him in place.

They were left with a folder and nothing else, not even a chance to question Huang Zeku about this supposed game. Todoroki could hear Midoriya and Iida arguing with Dazai about what happened and getting Bakugou back but Dazai rejected their idea of using force.

“You don’t challenge the leader of a section of this city through force unless absolutely necessary. We can help you fight him but what happens after? You kids will go back to your hero school and ADA has to deal with possible retaliations. That was not part of the deal,” Dazai said coldly. “There is a way to get your friend back peacefully so we will not jump to violence as the solution immediately.”

“You’re not going to help someone in need because there’s potentially a risk in helping them?” Sato cried out in disbelief.

Todoroki couldn’t believe his ears. Even Endeavor wouldn’t be this cowardly.

“No.” Dazai glanced down at his phone, presumably messaging his colleagues about the situation when the phone didn’t connect. “We’re not going to enter a physical brawl with Huang Corp to extract a student. Bakugou is unconscious, he can’t protect himself if a fight breaks out right now and you aren’t allowed to use your quirks. All of you are currently a liability in battle. Both Oda and I don’t have abilities that are strong on offense. We don’t know the state of Class B or Atsushi. There is a less violent way of getting your friend back that doesn’t involve starting a feud so yes, we’re not immediately throwing punches.”

“Weren’t you supposed to protect us while we’re in Yokohama?” Kaminari asked weakly. “Bakugou got kidnapped!”

“We’ve recommended that you leave. Also, our agreement with Port Mafia was that we’d try our best to ensure your survival. You broke the rules first too.”

“How can you say that?” Midoriya gritted the words through his teeth. “And Kacchan or Shinsou weren’t even present when we used our quirks. Why are they being punished?”

“That is how this works. Your mistake will hurt those associated with you.”

Todoroki had heard about this before. It was collective punishment that organized crime liked to use. One person’s failure will cause the death of those they held dear. One person’s sins would eventually be retaliated upon by another. Responsibility was shared and all held at equal judgment even if one of them hadn’t done anything wrong.

Because it wasn’t about who was at fault, only suffering was the goal.

There were talks about taking Bakugou’s place, that negotiation must be possible somehow. They will leave Yokohama. They will apologize.

“Look,” Dazai said. The dip in his voice was a boom of thunder over their heads, stopping them from talking at once. The man no longer joked or stared at them with amusement, not even with the slick ease he had when talking with Huang Zeku. His eyes were dark and empty, similar to Kyuusaku’s. In fact, Todoroki thought that all of these Yokohama locals occasionally had a similar look to them. It was fleeting on most people, like a chip or crack in

the wall that revealed a whirlpool of darker secrets underneath. “You can’t be promising things that you can’t make decisions for when you haven’t even talked to your teachers yet. The important thing right now is to ensure none of you are going to get compromised too. Negotiations are about leverage and right now, we are losing the more you panic and try to argue with me. If he made a proposal then Huang Zeku has no intention of killing Bakugou this instant. We’re going back to the agency and that is the end of this conversation.”

He wasn’t open to any further discussions. Todoroki glanced back at the entrance of Suribachi City. The island sat in the distance, connected to the rest of Yokohama by a lone bridge. Waves rocked against the edges of the island while the city glowed. Hues of neon glow blended into the night sky, luminous and lush because the party only started. On their way out, Todoroki saw bars and pubs opening their doors and the lanterns in the streets being lit.

Gold and red, the dragon’s den welcomed all but Todoroki couldn’t help but wonder...how many made it out.

3

It was late in the night when Sakaguchi Ango walked down the stairs to a bar he liked. Lupin. The sign buzzed slightly above his head when he pushed open the door to the basement bar with no windows.

With work piling on, it had been a while since he was able to visit. The place was the exact same though, with the dimly warm lights and the smell of wooden furniture. It wasn’t a spacious place but the atmosphere was welcoming, with soft jazz music in the background and the quiet conversations between patrons. Lupin wasn’t the easiest bar to find so it was mostly familiar faces that occupied the seats.

“The usual please.” Nodding at the bartender, Ango pulled out a seat next to Dazai and Oda. He saw his own reflection in the polished glass that the bartender set down. The man in the reflection had dark hair and even darker eyebags under his round glasses. His brown suit was roughed up slightly, with wrinkles that he didn’t have time to iron out because he had been stuck at his office desk for two days in a row. The mole above the left corner of his lip tilted down as he scowled at the elongated image of his disheveled state.

Over time had been killing him.

“How’s work?” Dazai asked with a very punchable smile.

“One day, I’m going to print all the case files that I’ve ever worked on because of the outsiders and slap the HPSC president with every single folder,” muttered Ango.

“Now that’s a dream!” Dazai slapped Ango on the back.

Oda shook his head. “Come on, Dazai. Leave Ango alone.”

The bartender gave Ango his tomato juice with a bit of salt. No alcohol for him tonight. If he did try to drain whiskey like Dazai or Oda, he would probably throw up.

Ango doesn't really remember the last time he ate either but he had been running on the fumes of spite. The Special Division of Unique Powers had been working with HPSC. Well, not working together but more like dragging meetings out so the heroes and outside laws couldn't interfere with Yokohama's business. There was already a system in place for ability users. It wasn't a perfect one but it didn't need the heroes to get involved.

While he could understand that HPSC would like to assess possible threats, he didn't believe in any of the better employment prospects or harmony crap that the outside government provided. He didn't even know how the arrests could possibly be carried out. If the ability user hadn't done anything incriminating, why would they want to chase them down until they start fighting back? It wasn't like they ran out of actual murderers to catch. Why should his department even care if someone wasn't using their powers to their full potential to the benefit of society? So what if an ability user who can produce electricity wanted to be a ballerina? As long as they weren't killing the audience, Ango didn't see why he should care.

The outsiders were given quirk assessments and many planned their careers accordingly. They were told their quirks were suitable for certain jobs, nudged towards the paths according to a trait they were born with. That was fine. But it should also be fine if someone wanted to try a new thing or chase a dream others didn't think they were suitable for. Ango couldn't understand why the officials from the outside were so shocked when he suggested that abilities don't determine passion.

"Should you two be this relaxed?" He rubbed his temple, knowing that the only reason he was out of the office wasn't just to catch a breather but that Huang Zeku was adding to his workload. "A student was kidnapped right in front of you."

"I don't see you kicking down the door of Huang Corp either and you're actual law enforcement." Dazai tapped his glass of liquor. The ice cubes shimmered as golden whiskey was poured in again. "The dragon pearl story?"

"Absolute bullshit," Ango coughed from behind his glass. "Director Taneda and Mori received intel about people matching the descriptions of the group that attacked UA recruiting criminals. They are looking for stronger ones this time and not street thugs that even inexperienced students can defeat. There are reports from the outside where burnt corpses have been found in alleys. Our agents haven't seen them but word of that recruitment effort has reached inside Yokohama too."

"You're worried that somebody might get the smart idea of kidnapping a student here to offer the League of Villains outside." Oda rubbed his chin. He might not be as smart as many of the geniuses in Yokohama but his past as an assassin sharpened his intuition. Letting Huang take a student in wasn't ideal but they'd be safe under his watch. "Why Bakugou then? The invisible girl would be harder to find if they smuggle her out. Endeavor's son or Ingenium's brother have more value as hostages."

"Because if I was the villain, I don't just want a hostage." Dazai lifted his glass, letting the ice clatter together inside his cup. "I want proof. First place of UA's sports festival. An explosion quirk and a natural gift in fighting. Taking down that boy will impress the League and wipe the floor with UA's reputation. That's how to get infamous and approval fast."

“Also, he’s not from a hero family.” Ango shifted in his spot, leaning against the bar’s cold counter to alleviate the exhaustion in his back. “Judging from the media presence, he’s not too well liked because of how he acted in the tournament either. He’s loud and he’s rough. It lowers the risk of bringing upon the full wrath of the pro heroes.”

Dazai wrapped an arm around Oda’s shoulders, pouring another cup for his friend. “Because while tragic, some might even say they’ve predicted an early fall for a kid who was too arrogant. Jealousy sure is a scary thing.”

“Mori and the Director don’t trust him either. We don’t need explosions being set off in this city if Bakugou needs to defend himself against villains. Thus, the dragon pearl story. At least it’d take one possible target off our streets. It’ll give the other students something to do so they aren’t getting too curious into other people’s business for the remainder of their stay too.”

They couldn’t just toss the kids out because villains might be targeting the class either. It would look like they were incompetent to handle the very kind of criminals that they repeatedly told the outside society that they didn’t need help with.

“And Huang agreed to it?”

“He doesn’t like the Hero Commission. He designs medical supplies, not weapons.” Even though he could probably do it if he tried. Abilities weren’t related to genetics and it was harder to conduct research on them. Artificial equipment made with scientific methods, however, were much easier to understand and replicate.

If they could get their hands on the technology that was.

“Before their field trip ends, we’ll hide a pretty rock somewhere and call that a dragon pearl. They will get their friend back and hopefully never return to Yokohama.”

“I still feel bad that we’re sticking the kid with Huang,” Oda peeled Dazai off him, the motion practiced and smooth without even needing to look at the other man. “Even without Kyuusaku..he’s always been weird.”

“Unpredictable, you mean.” Ango didn’t like dealing with children. He especially hated dealing with psychotic children.

Dazai laughed. “He’s not unpredictable. His standard of normal is just difficult to gauge. Like that a bomber about two years back who walked into a bookstore with a suicide jacket of lemon-shaped bombs. The logical course of action would be to stop the bomber or diffuse the bombs. No matter how most people would go about it, those two were the main goals. However, Huang ordered his subordinates to bring him more C4 from a nearby construction site and to buy a box of fireworks, which he shoved into the bomber’s mouth, pressuring him to detonate and go out with a bigger bang.”

Ango groaned. He remembered that case. His heart was at his throat as he evacuated everyone out. Of course, the bomber chickened out after seeing how crazy Huang was so no damage was actually done.

“He’s dangerous because you don’t know what will set him off. It’s a gamble to what he decides as a normal consequence. You might die or he might force you into community service, just look at Kyuusaku.”

Now Ango was feeling the pain in his stomach. Q was different headache altogether.

“We can’t let *that* be in the wrong hands. Such a dangerous power must be governed by those strong and responsible enough. If we can’t control it, we will kill it. This is the normal line of thinking.” Shivering, Ango felt as if there were ants under his skin when he remembered the kind of walking disaster Q could inflict. “Huang...he’s actually raising that kid.”

Normally too.

Q’s ability was activated by touch. If they couldn’t play sports or contact games, then board and cards and video games. It was a big company and the orphanage was always open. It wasn’t hard to find someone who could play with them. Instead of keeping them locked up in a lab or a prison, throw tutors and books at them until they don’t have the energy to cause havoc. Ango couldn’t keep a straight face the first time he learned that Q was being tortured at Huang Corp.

By university statistics.

While Ango wouldn’t say the Huangs had a heartwarming family dynamic, it was still a miracle anybody could treat Q like any regular kid. The rest of Huang Corp was involved too even if not all of them knew Q’s power.

This single mom suggested toy books, that grandfather pulled out a chess board, and another uncle got remote control cars. A piece of parenting advice from here and an extra bento box made in the morning by someone’s wife...together, they somehow managed to scrape together a semi-normal environment for raising a child.

“Former working girls, housewives stuck with their missing husband’s debt, veterans told they were of no more use, people down on their luck, avengers...” Dazai took a large gulp of his whiskey. “Suribachi City was built by trash other people discarded. They are more afraid of falling back into hell than an abomination of a kid. Besides, they had experience dealing with Huang first.”

Children were dangerous in Yokohama, especially those who were ability users. Port Mafia’s gravity watchdog had been a child when he led a group of orphans to survive shootouts in the streets. At fifteen, Dazai worked for Port Mafia to kill opposing gangs behind the scene.

“I’d like them better if they stopped adding to my work.” Ango could deal with murderous children or even pathologically ill teenagers sick in the head. What he couldn’t do was punch a group of civilians without proper reason.

“But you’d still side with Huang Corp,” Dazai pointed out. “Broke Mori’s heart while you were at it too.”

Ango had been an undercover agent in the past, that was how he met Dazai and Oda. He infiltrated Port Mafia but then Mori sent him to go undercover at Huang Corp. It was almost funny in an erratic sense. Ango was uncovering for the government in Port Mafia and then undercover for Port Mafia in Huang Corp. He was probably the only person who had ever worked for all the major players in Yokohama before.

“That’s different. I made a judgment call on what will be best for Yokohama.”

Ango had never known Huang Zeku to be a garrulous talker. Even back then, the boy was more the laconic type, always succinct despite the brevity of his words. From Port Mafia’s reports and the rumors from the streets, Huang Zeku was a threat. Perhaps even a hedonistic killer in the making.

He’d look at the spilled organs and ripped flesh with fond nostalgia, relishing in the bloodshed and cared very little for death. Every fight was in pursuit of strength, to chase power and stronger opponents. He expanded his power and he took, just like the other gangs that came before him.

At least, that was before Ango got caught trying to steal information from Huang Corp. The night was a quiet one when he slipped into Huang Corp’s lab. It was cold and the chemicals bubbled beneath while he walked across metal beams. The only light was from the row of eerie green bulbs that lined the wall. Flesh draped down from the ceiling, bulging like grapes growing along metal vines. They were synthetic but the squishy feeling and the hint of warmth underneath the beige flesh almost caught Ango off guard. When he walked, for a second he couldn’t tell if he was hearing the sound of his footsteps or his heart racing.

Huang Zeku sat at the end of the metal walkway. Energy drinks and jello scattered around him while he typed on a laptop. He wasn’t supposed to be here, not this late and not working on numbers instead of paying attention to a spy. Huang Zeku had just fought another gang and he was supposed to be healing. That was why Ango picked tonight.

Thirteen years old and thin as puberty stretched his bones, Ango could see the evidence of battle mixed with growing pains beneath the child’s bandaged legs.

“I want to kill you.” The child pushed his bangs back. His hair had grown long since he was first spotted in Yokohama.

“What are you waiting for then?” Ango accepted his fate. Being undercover always had its risks.

“Yokohama lacks resources.”

Huang Zeku slouched forward, meeting Ango’s eyes while a dejected sigh filled the silence between them.

“The trinity of powers takes care of problems as they are emerging or after the fact. You keep balance but it takes more than not getting bombed on the way to work for people to survive. Port Mafia can’t keep their wealth circulating fast enough.”

Port Mafia was big but it takes a lot of money to keep that many people. The more they extort the locals, more would turn to crime or death. You could only squeeze out so much profit from a corpse. That was a problem of shutting Yokohama off to the rest of the world for so long. Their economy was harder to maintain and while over the years, they had opened up trade or businesses with the outside, it was hard to establish a steady business with the internal struggles of power.

Also, the demand just wasn't there.

In a quirk society, Yokohama was at a disadvantage about what they had to offer. Huang Zeku offered to fill that gap with his technology. If he succeeded, it would help the people of Yokohama. Ango shouldn't believe him. This was a kid who could kill without remorse and surrounded himself with experiments from hell. But as Ango watched the kid's dark eyes, he saw a determination that he hadn't seen in many of the others in this city. Huang Zeku was the reflection of Yokohama's failure.

Young and alone, fighting battles that normal children shouldn't have to participate in. The responsibilities he held shouldn't have been a weight set upon one boy's shoulders. Ango had seen others pushed for change before. From criminal heads who slayed their way to the top to police who went on the job without knowing if they would make it home that night, people fought for survival in this city.

And here was a boy who saw a deeper issue and thought possibility didn't just lay at the end of a gun but in a lab where fake flesh pulsed as if alive and pots of acid and chemicals brewed dangerously beneath them. Ango decided to take a chance.

He made the decision to expose his connection to the government and proposed a collaboration.

"I don't regret my choice," Ango told Dazai and Oda. "Betraying Port Mafia or working with Huang Corp...I will do everything that is needed to keep this city flourishing."

The other two men nodded in understanding. They might have differing views on certain subjects or stood firm for their respective organizations but preserving Yokohama had always been a common goal amongst them.

"Cheers to surviving another day." Oda raised his glass and the other two followed. "Let's hope Huang doesn't break the kid's limb before his friends figure out the case."

Ango couldn't wait for the week to be over.

4

Katsuki woke up to a breeze with the scent of lotus. His brain was awake before the rest of him. He could feel the softness of the bed beneath him and the smoothness of the familiar silk. Above him and through bleary eyes, he saw the carved wood above the bed. At the edge of the bed, the red canopy glistened slightly as it bent under the gentle wind that sneaks in through the open window.

It was the best sleep he had in a while and that was a problem.

Sitting up, he moved out of bed silently. Polished tiled and circular windows, the room was decorated in a mix of traditional Chinese and modern fashion. His fingers glided over a porcelain vase on the table, tapping against the blooming rose and peony petals that added a sense of life to the otherwise spacious but empty room. Besides the sweetness of the flowers, he could smell the salt of the open waters and light hint of freshly brewed coffee. It was bright outside, meaning his classmates must have had a sleepless night already.

The idiots must be panicking right now.

Katsuki could already see them pulling their hair out, trying to figure out how to get him back. It wouldn't have resulted in this situation if they had heeded his warning. Don't get too curious. Don't try to know too much. They weren't ready for Yokohama even if Kyuusaku had stayed away.

Dumbasses. He couldn't do more even if he wanted, not if Mori was already pulling strings behind the scenes. All he could do was use the opportunity to at least minimize the damage. He pushed Vlad King out of the way, jumping into action before the pro hero could engage with Huang Corp's pawns first. If they had to kidnap anybody, it was easier to take him first and he knew Mori and Taneda wanted him to get taken.

Katsuki was a problem. Sticking a problem with the dragon was the easiest choice for the other organizations.

He might have hated them if this wasn't part of the plan.

His eyes landed on the bookshelf on the far side of the room. There were titles on there that he had wanted to read for a long time but he ignored them and pulled the thickest one there was. The door was unlocked and he stepped out without any issues or people running to stop him. There wouldn't be any. Kyuusaku had their own level in Huang Corp and they were in class with a tutor. As far as anybody was concerned, nobody would be able to harm the owner of Huang Corp in his own home either. Not to mention the dragon preferred privacy.

The rest of the penthouse was styled just like the room; clean white hallways and occasionally flowers and wooden furniture. There weren't a lot of decorations but the view of Yokohama and the ocean was spectacular. Katsuki passed by a home shrine, small and nailed into the wall above where spirit tablets were set. Beneath, incense burned while a plate of washed fruits were offered to the dead on a round table. Thin wisps of white smoke climbed towards the ceiling. When the sunlight filtered in from the window, Katsuki could see parts of the smoke shimmering gold.

He pulled out two new incenses and lit them, adding both inside the bronze censer.

Then he found his kidnapper in the living room.

Huang Zeku stood with a cup of coffee while half-listening to the news.

“You fucking asshole,” Katsuki cursed as he raised the book like a brick. Swinging it down, the book hit hard scales as Zeku’s arm came up to block but he didn’t care. The blond teen brought the book down again before his wrist was caught in a grasp. Rolling his eyes, Katsuki let the book drop between them. It landed heavily on the carpet. “You drugged me?”

“Good morning to you too,” Zeku said, taking a sip of his coffee even as Katsuki scowled. Letting Katsuki go, his fingers brushed over the edge of Katsuki’s eyebrows then to the corner of his eyes. “You look terrible and welcome home.”

Katsuki yanked on Zeku’s ponytail. “Where’s the stupid clock?”

“Table.”

Zeku set his coffee down while Katsuki found the digital clock on the coffee table and set a timer for three minutes. When the countdown started, he finally started screaming.

“You let Kyuusaku out? We’re trying to scare the living daylights out of them, not maim them for life!”

“You try dealing with the homicidal brat then,” replied Zeku coldly.

“I’m the one stuck with a bunch of idiots with a death wish twenty-four seven!”

“Have you seen the paperwork on my desk?”

Katsuki grabbed Zeku by the collar, shaking him. “I have Dazai and Ranpo both breathing down my neck for God’s sake!”

“My office has been a circus with all the extra meetings.”

“I wasn’t supposed to be knocked out for the kidnapping!”

“Dazai’s going to know something is up if you can’t act properly. You suck at lying.” Zeku grabbed Katsuki’s face, squeezing his cheeks so that his mouth resembled a duck.

“Oh, like your brooding iceface and monotone is so believable?” Katsuki hissed, his words contorted by the hands stretching and pinching his face. In retaliation, he grabbed Zeku’s long hair, messing it up.

“I got us this far.”

“People suck.”

“Can’t we just kill them?”

“How many times do I have to tell you to stop killing everything that annoys you?”

“Better than driving myself crazy.”

Their conversation was barely coherent but neither cared. When the timer went off, Zeku released Katsuki and the latter wrapped his arms around him. Katsuki inhaled deeply as he buried his face in Zeku's chest. With the warmth of another's skin beneath him, Katsuki snuggled closer. He smelled the ink and books mixed with a slightly sweet undertone of incense...or maybe that was the blood they never seemed to be able to wash out of Yokohama.

But this was the scent of security and safety.

The weight of arms around him was nice too. Katsuki closed his eyes, letting himself be carried over to the sofa. "I missed you."

"This would be a lot easier if you just tell them we know each other."

Both of them knew that wouldn't work. It wasn't like Katsuki could just casually admit he was dating a guy who happened to live in the most dangerous city in Japan. Everything had to be logical. They had to have their story straight or else people would find out he wasn't all that he seemed to be.

Nobody can find out who he was.

He felt cold scales wrapped around his ankle. There was a weight on his pants and it crawled up his leg. Coiled Dragon squeezed between them. It had shrunk down to the size of a lizard. There were bumps on its back and it crawled with multiple appendages like a caterpillar. It was a horrifying creature even in this form, resembling a large worm with its pale color and multiple eyes. When it purred, its mouth split wide and its jaw lowered like a snake's before a meal despite how it had features similar to a human fetus.

Katsuki smiled.

"I missed you too." He nuzzled against the creature, kissing it lightly. "Who's a good dragon? Yes, yes you are. You're the best dragon."

It made a happy noise as its tail wrapped around Katsuki's forearm. The dragon pressed itself close, finding a comfortable spot against Katsuki's neck and licked the human fondly.

"Stupid lizard," muttered Zeku while poking Coiled Dragon. The dragon chewed on the end of its master's finger lightly before shuffling to face Zeku with its butt.

Laughing, Katsuki leaned his head on Zeku's lap. It was always fun to see Zeku bicker with his dragon. Coiled Dragon was a part of Zeku, half of Zeku's power splitted out and given a consciousness of its own but ultimately, Zeku was still the one controlling it. Effectively, he was fighting himself and Katsuki would never not find that entertaining.

Red hair fell over Katsuki, the scarlet shadows like the bars of a cage but he wasn't scared. He met his boyfriend's gaze. Zeku had a handsome face and a body whetted over time through battle. Katsuki could trace the details of Zeku's face from memory. From the sharp edge of his eyes to the end of his eyebrows, down the straight bridge of his nose towards the hard edge of his pursed lip...Katsuki knew everything by heart. They had known each other

for years. It was a secret that Katsuki kept to himself. Throughout the years, he had snuck into Yokohama plenty of times by himself.

Katsuki knew the worst of Yokohama and the best of it as well. All the dirty little secrets, all the acts of compassion, this city was not what the outside world believed it to be.

So he was going to help protect it. The careful balance here must not be disturbed.

Because only then, Katsuki would be alright.

His hand touched the edge of Zeku's earring. The tassel was tied into a knot that wished for good luck and safety, a crude imitation of a past that Katsuki pieced together during the years. Huang Zeku wasn't an ability user or somebody with a strong quirk. He wasn't a scientific experimentation that ran away or a lost soul sinking into violence.

He was from another world.

The boy fell into this one when he was young. Back in his world, the apocalypse had taken earth, driving the last of civilization underground. Through twisted humor or some sort of coping mechanism, people participated in tournaments to the death for entertainment. Young and old, they were even willing to modify their bodies with machines for power. They figured out a technology of Cores, where the power to kill could be transplanted into people through a surgery. It wasn't genetics or a chance of fate that decided their life. In his world, power could be bought by gold and a coin-toss gamble with death.

That was what gave Zeku his power.

Death was common. Strength was praised.

Not much difference from Yokohama.

The people there killed to become a champion, to stand over everyone else above the hellhole of trash and the ones here killed to maintain their ranks too.

"What are you smiling about?" Zeku asked.

Katsuki hugged Coiled Dragon tighter. The beast was cold to the touch but he didn't mind. The hardness of its scales and the way its flesh pressed against his chest made him feel safe. The monster that normal people would find repulsive or terrifying was his champion, the only thing that he ever felt fully relaxed around. "I'm tired," he said softly.

It was difficult for him to have a full night of sleep. There were voices that called to him at night, louder and more desperate. When he was young, occasionally he would hear his parents' footsteps and the quiet noise of doors opening. They were home but he knew better than to run to them about night terrors. His parents were busy with business trips and they wouldn't be of any help. The adults had more important issues to tend to. Katsuki was old enough to sleep on his own, he was strong. He was strong.

He was weak.

That was the truth Katsuki learned when he was five. He was weak. He wasn't as smart as the likes of Ranpo or as cruel and logical as Mori. He wasn't as powerful as Nakahara and he would never match the mercenaries in experience within a few short years. Death was so easy to come by too. A stray bullet. An ill thought. The quirk that everybody praised was just a quirk if he relied on it blindly.

It was very easy to take a life.

His life, in particular, was no different to those with power.

He supposed that was one of the reasons why he chased after power. If he was the best and the strongest and the fastest, he would be safe. If he had power, no one else could bend him to their wills. He enjoyed it. The chase for power was rewarding and he loved victories.

However, it could get exhausting. When the whispers in the dark grew too loud or when he wasn't him, the only place he ever felt safe was next to the dragon and his champion. His. Only his.

The one anchor in his life.

"Stay," he mumbled as he held Zeku's hand. There was a squeeze around his hand, the silent answer returned by Zeku. Closing his eyes, Katsuki felt a kiss on the back of his hand. Only Katsuki knew how soft those lips that spilled cold words were and the thought of that warmed his heart with a fuzzy sweetness. He pressed his chin closer against the top of Coiled Dragon's head. There was a tingling along his tongue, burning as if he was swallowing liquid silver. Katsuki held a whimper in. There were noises again. Men and women, children and teens, people shouted in the distance and their arguments echoed in his head.

The worldly evils were plotting. For fame, for wealth, for a desire to change. Everybody had their reasons and Yokohama was the prize.

But they would fail, as the countless others before them did and the numerous others after them would. That was how Katsuki and Zeku had survived.

Katsuki won't let anybody ruin this for him. Not the mafia, villains, heroes, and if he must...not even his classmates or teachers. There was a price to be paid for peace.

Whatever the toll, he would make impossibilities a reality.

Chapter End Notes

This is a very long chapter even for me LOL but I finally got Zeku and Katsuki together.

Let me know how it was and enjoy the weekend! (●✧∀✧●)

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Battle of the six realms spoiler.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

1

Yokohama's mornings were cold.

While tendrils of sunlight peeked over the mountains, a fog still blanketed the shores. Occasionally, there was a distant blare from the horn of a ship. Kirishima saw the blinking lights offshore from Sero and Kaminari's hotel room. Since Bakugou had been taken, Aizawa-sensei didn't want Kirishima to be alone. He helped put Shinsou back in the room he shared with Awase from Class B (Class B had an odd number of boys) then crashed on the sofa in his friends' room.

The night couldn't have passed by fast enough for Kirishima. He felt as if he spent half the night staring at shadows, living through the day's events in his head repeatedly. What went wrong? Where did they go wrong?

Bakugou was in danger because of them and he couldn't even figure out what they did wrong.

Kirishima stared at the ceiling, watching the darkness close in around the lights then fade towards the corners as the sun climbed higher. Throughout the night, he heard his friends tossing and turning because they were probably still trying to process everything like he was.

Even when morning came, none of them could find an appetite or hold down anything other than warm water. The scent of food returned them to last night, where red eyes stared at them expectantly across the table, fangs dragging over the red flesh of sly tongue patiently waiting until the right moment to strike. Last night was a feast, where Kirishima and his friends were part of the menu.

The Huangs fed on their discomfort and fear, savoring their anger while gloating, knowing that they were as helpless as the dead fish on a plate.

When they closed their eyes, they could see the corpses of those who went insane. The blood. The smell. The screams.

And Bakugou's limp body caught between the dragon's claws.

Everybody gathered back in ADA's conference room. Class B was shaken, talking about how they were ambushed out of the blue. Atsushi was escorting them back when Bakugou and Shinsou were snatched. Their attackers moved so fast that when Vlad wanted to react, he nearly got pushed into active traffic had Bakugou not shoved him out of the way at the last minute.

"I'm so sorry," Atsushi apologized. His head was lowered and regret was deep in his voice. "If I had been faster..."

"You protected the other students," Vlad-sensei said with a shake of his head. "None of that matters right now anyways. How do we get Bakugou back?"

Their teachers were calmer than Kirishima imagined. However, Aizawa-sensei's face was dark as ink and the man was glaring at Dazai. "This is kidnapping," Aizawa-sensei said darkly. He was seething. Kirishima knew the man must be even more mad than he was during the USJ incident. "You have over twenty witnesses. They assaulted my students and they killed people. Why can't the police arrest them immediately?"

Yeah. It didn't make sense. Kyuusaku openly caused violence and Huang Zeku basically threatened them all. He was holding Bakugou against his will too! The police should be able to do something.

Kirishima looked at the other side of the room. Atsushi and Dazai sat on either side of President Fukuzawa. Ranpo was in another chair closer to the window, legs crossed and hat tilted down low.

"Because Huang Corp has a permit and it was in their right to kill intruders." Even if their appearances differed greatly, President Fukuzawa reminded Kirishima of Fourth Kind. The stoic and stern type of traditional men. "The mafia members had committed a taboo of selling corpses, especially to outsiders. They betrayed Port Mafia and trespassed on Huang Corp's territory. The others have been encouraging people to use their powers irresponsibly. In Yokohama, that is a serious felony."

"Worthy of execution?" Shinsou asked accusingly. He was rubbing his head, where a small lump had formed from being thrown on the ground by the dragon last night.

The others, including Kirishima, also found what happened to be extreme. They could understand accidents during missions or last resorts in a heated battle. However, the people under Kyuusaku's manipulation were defenseless. They weren't fighting back any time soon.

"While we wouldn't recommend death as their punishment immediately either, you have to understand that riling people with powers up for violence is considered terrorism here," Dazai explained. "Those with quirks or abilities can live amongst the population, we can use our powers but we can't believe ourselves to have the freedom or right to use our powers as we wish. Most of Yokohama is quirkless. They don't have the means to defend themselves against most superpowers. Think of this as an example; Maybe farting fire will help someone relieve stress but they can't do it in a crowded theater. You can't inconvenience or potentially endanger others just so you feel better. If you start to think having powers makes you unique

or more important than those without, we're going to have the same problem of lawless violence with no balance. What those people were advocating was a danger to our peace."

The detectives said that a quirk was a trait. There was no difference between those with and without a quirk. People with horns were not any more special than those with wings or those with nothing. It was understandable. Kirishima didn't think people were somehow more or less because of a feature. They were all unique but equal.

What he couldn't wrap his head around was why killing was the solution chosen to solve the issue.

"We're not here for an ethics debate. How does that tie into why the police won't go after Huang Corp? My student was taken." Aizawa-sensei glared at the men. "I'm trying to be patient with you here but I can't anymore. You haven't even called the police! You told me this isn't a police matter last night. What is then?"

President Fukuzawa sighed, "It's complicated."

"A teenager was taken against his will. What is so complicated about that?" barked Vlad-sensei. His fangs were bared and his voice rumbling deep with anger.

Both pro heroes were seething. Kirishima wanted to jump up and bang his fists on the table too and he knew a lot of his classmates shared the same sentiment. They felt even more powerless than back at USJ. Back then, at least they could fight back when last night, they couldn't even try to talk. All they could do was watch helplessly as their friend was taken.

Was Bakugou imprisoned right now? Locked up or drugged unconscious still? Maybe he was awake and fighting. Maybe he was hurt.

Bakugou was a friend. Kirishima's chest tightened at the thought of his classmate bleeding out in some cold dark corner. Ever since school started, Kirishima decided that he was going to have a new beginning, to try his best and not repeat middle school again. At first, Bakugou wasn't the easiest person to get to know but he had every bit of confidence that Kirishima longed for. Power and drive, a nerve of steel, and a clear head despite changing situations. Sure, Bakugou had a foul mouth but he never meant any harm. They were all at UA chasing a goal. Kirishima admired Bakugou's focus on his dream.

Bakugou didn't deserve to die in a city of villains.

"The enemy isn't one ability user," said Ranpo. He had been very quiet since learning about what the students went through and didn't provide any comments regarding the kidnapping. Kirishima tried to read the detective. Ranpo was a self-proclaimed genius. None of them had ever seen him work a case but he was clearly important to the rest of ADA, who waited for his word before acting on certain things. Even President Fukuzawa looked at the younger man or Dazai before making decisions.

It was Ranpo who stopped Atsushi from calling the police last night.

Ranpo stood up, walking closer to the heroes and students. Pointing at Tsuyu, he asked, “What happens to villains after they have served their sentences?”

The frog girl frowned with confusion but still answered, “They are released from prison.”

“And?”

“...What do you mean?”

“They are released from prison and life continues on, right? However, it’s harder because of the time they served in prison. Not everybody is willing to give people like that a second chance. Not everybody can afford to bet on a second chance even if they know some of these people just need a hand.” Ranpo slowly turned his head, meeting all of them in the eyes. “Runaways, ex-prostitutes, mercenaries... Suribachi was built by those most could consider a lost cause, people that nobody else would care about. Huang Zeku gathered them and gave them a purpose. The weak and the old and the young, those too normal to fight alone. They survived because of him. The gangs don’t touch them because they are the Dragon’s. With Huang Corp gone, they go back to being groveling beneath the feet of scum.”

Ranpo’s voice was a knife of ice slicing into their ears. Something clicked in Kirishima’s head and he understood why Principal Nedzu had given his speech before they departed. This was organized crime. A random group of villains all collaborating on the same bank heist couldn’t all be considered the same. The criminals that they were familiar with were usually one or a few people wanting notorious fame and wealth. They could flip upon each other easily once caught or when the fifteen minutes of adrenaline was gone. Maybe a few would exact revenge for their friends or lovers but most would scatter at the first sign of danger.

It was unusual to see loyalty bonding amongst a large group.

Unspoken but understood across all professions and socioeconomic status. It was almost... a part of their culture?

“You want to get back one friend. They are fighting for their lives. Your enemy isn’t one guy with a strong quirk or a kid who isn’t right in the head. It’s the chef who cooked your lunch and the granny who sold you souvenirs. It is every kid who can go to school on his charity and everybody who escapes the darker trades because of his rules.”

“No cop will help you in Suribachi City,” Dazai said in simplified terms. “You won’t find your friend if you go in with a badge and up in arms.”

There was a noise of a chair dragging across the floor. Kirishima turned his head to see Midoriya on his feet. His chair wobbled a few steps behind him from being pushed hard. His hands were on the edge of the table and his elbows trembled as if he was trying to hold himself back.

“What you’re saying is we have to play by his rules.” The green haired teen’s eyes burned with determination. His jaw was locked tight as he stared down the detectives. “Find the dragon pearl and we will get Bakugou back without having to fight them.”

“That is correct,” President Fukuzawa confirmed.

Midoriya turned to look at the rest of them and Kirishima and the others nodded back.

Even Monoma didn’t make fun of them with his usual snide comments about class rivalry. He held up the folder the lady from Huang Corp gave Class A.

“What are we waiting for then?” he asked as he spilled the paper out on the conference room table.

Kirishima grabbed the first piece of paper closest to him. “Let’s get Bakugou back!”

He just hoped they wouldn’t be too late.

2

According to the folder, the security guard noticed the dragon pearl was missing around two thirty in the afternoon three days before Class A met the Huangs. There was a garden at Huang Corp where the dragon pearl sat at the top of a fountain. They were given pictures of a beautiful garden and the head-scratching mystery of how somebody could have stolen Coiled Dragon’s treasure under the watch of heavy patrol.

The most frustrating thing, however, was the actual description of the dragon pearl they were supposed to find.

“What the hell do they mean that we will know it’s the dragon pearl when we see it?” Mina yelled in frustration. “Is it supposed to be round? Blue? Red? Sparkly? Anything? If the security guard can notice it’s gone, can’t they give us a description so we know what we’re looking for?”

“They are purposefully making this impossible,” noted Uraraka. They couldn’t go into Huang Corp to observe the place or find clues. They could talk to the employees coming out of Huang Corp’s tower but not all of them had even seen the dragon pearl before. A lot of the entry level people they questioned didn’t even know their boss had a dragon pearl.

Kirishima knew it wasn’t going to be easy but Huang Corp certainly wasn’t helping at all.

“So all we know right now is that this thing is supposed to be invaluable,” Todoroki sighed as he rubbed the bridge of his nose, tired already. The day had crept away from them as they sorted through the huge stack of paper of employee testimonies. Most of it was garbage of course, some were even plain gibberish.

“Why would he leave something that precious in a garden?” Sero banged his fist on his thigh. “What’s so special about it anyway? Does it sing? Gives you immortality?”

“Maybe it needed to be soaked in water.”

“This isn’t Harry Potter.”

“Couldn’t he have left that in the bathtub?”

“It has to be small enough that people can snatch it without alerting any guards, right?” Yaoyorozu tried to gesture with her hands. “If it was statue sized, it would be hard to sneak past security without anybody knowing.”

“Maybe they hid it in a cleaning cart and moved it out like in the movies.”

“The dragon was pretty huge. Shouldn’t its pearl be bigger?”

“Wait, so what even if a dragon pearl?” Kendo’s head swayed while Atsushi helped her bring more coffee back to the group. “Did the dragon cough it out?”

Monoma arched an eyebrow. “Like cat hairballs?”

“Or maybe it’s just a harder piece of dragon shit?” Tetsutetsu suggested.

Kendo smacked them both on the back of their heads.

“Maybe a bird picked it up because it’s shiny,” Kaminari said. All of their brains felt scrambled from trying to decipher this. A few of their classmates were canvassing the city with Kunikida. They sent out a small group of students with Atsushi to search too. Jirou and Shouji were amongst them. They might not be able to use their quirks but nobody can stop them from having sharper senses. Perhaps they would accidentally overhear something. The teachers went out too, investigating on their own.

“We must be missing something,” Iida stressed while he looked at the giant whiteboard that Dazai provided them. They had notes about the timeline scribbled across and other paper taped to it. “Things don’t just disappear.”

“What if the culprit had an ability or quirk?” Ojirou was worried and that would be Kirishima’s worst nightmare too. How would they even begin to track the dragon pearl if it wasn’t stolen normally?

But they had to solve this case.

Hang in there, Bakugou. Kirishima thought as he opened the window to let some air in. It might help them keep a leveled head. The moon was high in the sky already and every second they spent by the table, Kirishima couldn’t help but feel like they were wasting time, precious time that Bakugou’s life was depending on.

He couldn’t imagine what Bakugou must be feeling right now. But knowing Bakugou, the blond would never go down without a fight so they wouldn’t either. They will do whatever it takes to bring back their friend.

3

Katsuki felt amazing.

It was wondrous how big of a difference a good sleep made. Katsuki stirred awake in the bedroom again. He woke up just in time for dinner and Coiled Dragon climbed up his leg as

soon as he stepped into the hall. It wrapped its tail around his chest and grabbed onto the fabric around his shoulder.

“Hey,” Katsuki said as he turned his head, kissing it lightly on the snout. Coiled Dragon made a small but loving noise back, licking the tiny pointed tip of its shrunken claw as it carefully made sure the edges were retracted into its flesh and not pressing into Katsuki. “Let’s go find the other half of you.”

A simple dinner was already on the dining table and Zeku was bringing out a pot of soup. He was out of his tang suit, wearing more comfortable joggers and a white T-shirt instead. His hair was tied up in a ponytail, where a few strands of stray hair fell past his neck.

“So do we even know what a dragon pearl should look like?” Sitting down at the table, Katsuki was curious.

Zeku shrugged. “Nope. Coiled Dragon doesn’t have that function.”

“Any idea of what you want it to be then?” Katsuki wondered if the other powers’ plan of finding a shiny glass sphere and sticking it inside a cave was going to fool his teachers. It was probably the safest method though. There were caves along the shore that even normal people could reach by renting the scuba gear and an instructor. They weren’t dangerous places or difficult nooks that would collapse any moment. It wouldn’t be impossible for Frog Face to swim down there. “We should at least make it look worth the time to complete the bluff. Gold? Silver? Something of value other than glass or fake quartz. Something pretty. It’s supposed to be precious to you.”

When Zeku didn’t answer, Katsuki tapped him on the ankle with his feet underneath the table. “Come on, the show must go on. We can’t have Mori running the whole show.”

“I’m looking at it then,” muttered Zeku. His red eyes were focused on Katsuki and the usual sharpness dissolved behind the steam of the soup.

Katsuki kicked him a little harder. “Sappy.”

The tips of the blond teen’s ears were tinted pink. He pulled Coiled Dragon off his shoulders, letting it settle on his lap. It opened its mouth and chewed through the pork Katsuki fed it easily, swallowing the meat before leaning its head on the table, eyeing the food as its tail wiggled.

Zeku shoved a piece of lettuce into its mouth and the dragon whimpered. It chewed on the vegetable, nibbling reluctantly instead of swallowing it down.

“Don’t bully Coiled Dragon.”

“It’s faking it.”

Of course Katsuki knew that. Coiled Dragon was smart and it chewed through their enemies in battle ferociously. Its stomach could even digest steel so there was no way it wouldn’t be able to eat a bit of green leaves but Katsuki liked to spoil it.

Who could say no to such a cute little monster?

Zeku huffed. "What are you going to do about Kyuusaku? They don't know about you or us."

"You're raising Kyuusaku just fine." Huang Corp was a one-man show. Without Zeku, they didn't have the same level of fire-power compared to the other fractions of Yokohama. While there were other ability users or people with quirks in the company, they needed another ace against Port Mafia or the Hunting Dogs. Kyuusaku filled the need. "See, you're not referring to Kyuusaku as an it anymore."

"I know nothing about raising a kid," Zeku muttered, too distracted to eat. "You said to keep the crazy kid alive so they are. If you plan on letting them help run this company, they need to know about you. Not all of it but they need to know this was your idea. This company and Suribachi...it's you. It's because of you. If I can't respond and you need help, they need to know what to do."

Kyuusaku was old enough too. They didn't want the kid to think too much or trusted them to keep a secret in the past since they were so young. They were older and they could protect themselves better now, knew how to run and how to hide or how to get the right kind of help. Still, the thought of telling someone else Katsuki's role in Yokohama was nerve-wrecking.

There were secrets best taken to the graves.

There were words that he couldn't say.

Stories only held power when reality was indistinguishable from fiction.

"I'll think about it," Katsuki promised softly. "Are you sure you're not just asking this because you're tired of Kyuusaku trying to play cupid?"

"Shut up." Zeku placed a hand on his throbbing temple. "I don't even know where they got the idea from."

Katsuki knew. It was because the secretary talked about romance dramas and since Zeku didn't have time to play with the kid (or knew how), Kyuusaku spent a lot of time wandering the company hallway and listening in on gossip. There was only so much that people talked about. The mundane things of sports and news, spouses and of course, family lives. Kyuusaku was probably trying to replicate the normal that they were used to hearing and seeing.

"It's their way of showing they care about you."

"If they have time to mess around, they should do an extra chapter of math homework."

Katsuki laughed and Zeku paused before sighing heavily. "I sound like the geezers, don't I?" Zeku grumbled darkly in embarrassment. He sounded just like the other middle-aged tiger moms and dads in the office talking about their slacking kids.

"See! You can raise a kid!" Katsuki beamed while trying his hardest to not burst out laughing. "You're doing fantastic!"

Rolling his eyes, Zeku got up and plucked Katsuki and Coiled Dragon out of his seat. Throwing them both over his shoulder, he brought them over to the sofa.

“Hey! I wasn’t done eating!”

“That can wait.”

A warm weight landed on Katsuki’s chest as Zeku leaned in. His arms wrapped around Katsuki’s waist as Coiled Dragon scampered on top of Katsuki’s head. The older teen closed his eyes while using Katsuki as a pillow. Seeing that, Katsuki relaxed his body and pulled Zeku’s hair tie off. Running his hand through the waterfall of scarlet, he hummed as he massaged his love’s scalp.

“You’re the best,” Katsuki whispered gently as strands of hair slipped between his fingers. “My champion.”

There was no response but Katsuki didn’t need there to be one. This was how it was between them, how it always had been. Words of love couldn’t compete with the weight of each other’s body. Tangled limbs and the quiet. It was always the quietest when they were alone together. Whether they were lying side by side under the stars while gunshots rang out two streets down or when they were in the penthouse with the noise of the city dimmed, Katsuki felt loved and safe.

Family. The word carried a slightly awkward feeling. With how busy they were with work, Katsuki hadn’t been close with his parents. It was fine because it worked out. It was fine because they had what they needed to do and he had his. But was that going to work with Kyuusaku?

He closed his eyes too and let himself be swept away by the voices of darker shadows. Colors swirled in front of him as memories surfaced. His mom’s smile and his father crying in the background, making a fool of himself but enjoying the time together.

“It’s not all bad, you know?” Katsuki said quietly, seemingly out of the blue as he touched Zeku’s earring. “The ice cream after the show was good. I beat dad in a goldfish game during summer festival.”

There were little pieces of the past that lit up in the river of memories like the fireflies of his childhood summer. The cold taste of soda icicles, broken unevenly in half but his mom always gave him the larger piece. The top of his dad’s brown hair that Katsuki used to yank on as he sat on the man’s shoulders to see the fireworks. Then as time slipped by, Katsuki grew distant from his parents. They were always so busy and he saw the tired lines on their faces. And maybe part of it was his fault too because he stopped being able to tell the shadows apart from reality. The voices replaced his mom’s lullaby and the darkness crept over his dad’s smiles.

What if...what if...they were the same as the shadows behind Mori? What if when the condition was right, they would decide Katsuki wasn’t a right part of their story? Because everybody had a price tag. Not just in one city. Not just outside of one city. No one was safe. No one could save him.

Most importantly, Katsuki didn't want to know if his parents would turn out the same as the evil he saw in Yokohama. They didn't need to know. He didn't need to know.

Only then could they pretend at peace.

But Katsuki didn't want to replicate that on Kyuusaku. The busy parent who never had time and was never around...Zeku should understand. His father fought in the tournaments to the deaths and came out triumph. The champion preserved his crown for eight years in a row, bathing in blood and glory that only power could guard so it left very little time for his son. Splitter, the usurper. He clawed his way to the throne with violence and the blood and bones he left behind shaped Zeku. That was what Katsuki was worried about.

It was easy to keep people alive but much harder to raise them right. They were too young. He wasn't whole and neither was Zeku. Lies and deaths were what they grew up with, as familiar as air. How could they expect to fill a void with broken pieces when the damage was already done?

"Do you think that will be enough for Kyuusaku?"

"They aren't normal. They will never be normal if that's what you're aiming for." Zeku was blunt as always. Some scars couldn't be undone and some pain was rooted too deep in people's bones to weed out. They could set out rules but they could never teach a heart. "And it's not us who can decide if it is enough. Not all bad is a start though, right?"

Katsuki gave it a thought as he stared at empty space. Slowly, he replied, "Yes. Yes, it is."

He would really hate it if his trust went to waste. Also, he just hoped that Kyuusaku wouldn't end up murdering them like Zeku did to his own father.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is Kyuusaku POV of gaining a new parent and Class A continue to run around like headless chickens.

Have a wonderful start of the week, people! BTW, if you're a guest and want to leave a comment, you can drop them on my tumbler (<https://marbelcrossovers.tumblr.com/>) as an ask in the meantime since AO3 stopped that function for the time being (too many spam by AI).

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1

The same blue sky of the outside world blanketed Yokohama.

It was strange why people thought otherwise. Yokohama wasn't an extraterrestrial base or a whole different realm separated from the rest of the world. The city didn't immediately swallow people into the earth and no demons rushed out to enslave people as soon as they set foot in the streets.

Kyuusaku wondered if their parents knew that before they threw them away. They must have been hoping for a quick death or maybe they saw the convenience of Yokohama. It was far from where they lived and it wasn't strange for orphans to be found along the borders of Yokohama. Maybe they had hoped a good family would pick Kyuusaku up. Kyuusaku would never know.

The memories from before Yokohama have faded, washed into faint colors by time. They remembered in fragments. A crooked tree. The jingly music of the ice cream truck driving by. The legs of a woman doing house chores and the scatter of toys on the living room floor. A briefcase sat by the door, waiting to be taken to work every morning. There was a cross on the wall. Prayers were sung during Christmas.

To be honest, Kyuusaku didn't remember what the woman and man who birthed them looked like. All that was left of the two was a blurry shadow of fear and disgust.

They remembered the hero a little bit better. A man, standing tall and strong for the cameras with his hearty smile. Most of the heroes tried to be friendly to a certain level, Kyuusaku supposed. They had to measure up to the No.1 and the standard had been set. But the smiles disappeared where the spotlights couldn't reach.

At four years old, Kyuusaku learned of betrayal as they sat in a cage.

A doctor bought Kyuusaku before the traffickers could ship them off to a shop. People had a price. The prettier ones tagged with high bids but not all sold alive or whole. The others might suffer worse fates but it was hard to tell. Sometimes the buyers wanted the merchandise with fresh screams and other times they wanted to preserve time in a can. Mori wanted something different from Kyuusaku though. Not a piece of their inside to live or a limb to add to a collection or any performances to service a need.

Mori wanted Kyuusaku's curse.

The ability to curse others, to bring about death and destruction through the victims' own hands.

Kyuusaku was given a bible and other story books, a dump from some children's collection found in donation bins. In the storage room of the underground clinic Mori ran, they had a space. Windowless and silent, the gray walls were Kyuusaku's lone companion beside their dolly.

There was another boy. Older with empty eyes and covered in bandages. Dazai Osamu scared Kyuusaku a little because Dazai felt the same as the scattered pieces of leftover products in the traffickers' basement. Kyuusaku didn't like corpses or Dazai, both of which were lifeless all the same. They were no fun and they provided no response.

Sometimes Dazai talked a lot when Mori was around, rambling about death with big words that Kyuusaku didn't understand. There was probably a negotiation or underlying threat in their conversations but Kyuusaku wasn't awake enough or had the spare attention to care most of the time.

Occasionally, Kyuusaku played board games with Elise. She was around ten and always dressed in a red dress with laces like the dolls that Kyuusaku's mom used to collect. Large curls of blonde hair would sway behind her as she demanded Mori to spoil her with desserts and dresses. Mori always gave in, begging and praying for her love but Kyuusaku didn't believe him.

It was an act.

It had to be an act.

Because Kyuusaku might be a child who brought misery and misfortune but they weren't dumb. Elise never aged. She disappeared sometimes without a trace. The things Kyuusaku told her, Mori would always know in an instant. Mori's customers at the clinic—mostly gangsters or other villains—looked disgusted but relieved when Mori acted lovestruck towards Elise. They were violent and nasty and they got hurt physically but the doctor was sick in the head. Just a doctor with a passion, a regular man who made a living in the gray corners of the city to fund his obsession. Nobody ever noticed how Mori watched everyone, including Elise, as if they were no different from a scalpel beside his surgery table.

They wouldn't suspect Mori to have an ambition for more.

Mori was busy earning the trust of Port Mafia's old boss. Dazai...Kyuusaku wasn't sure what he did outside of the clinic. Maybe he tried out methods of suicide everyday or he helped Mori arrange a stage for other people to end each other. More bandages appeared on him and the same happened to Kyuusaku. White bandages wrapped over their skin. New layers were added while the odd was soaked in red.

There were razors on the underside of the clothing Mori provided.

The metal made the fabric stiff to touch. It was harder to walk in them too. Running was a pain to endure, bending down too fast or at the wrong angles caused them to bleed. Sharp edges dug into Kyuusaku's skin when they were in a crowd, where a slight touch would hurt ten folds more as the razors bit into their flesh.

Mori let them out from time to time. Kyuusaku was told to spread their madness to others, criminals or villains who were in Mori's way. These people were more fun than Dazai ever would be. They screamed and squirmed and the best part about madness? It manifested differently in everybody.

Maybe their parents had been right all along. Kyuusaku shouldn't have been born. They didn't like pain but when their blood dripped, they were amused by how people cracked.

When they ripped Dolly apart to unleash mayhem, pieces of people came apart. All the careful masks that they wore fell apart and the dark secrets they kept were dragged under the sun. It was as if Kyuusaku smashed open a pinata—they never actually touched a real one before—and all the treats spilled out.

Mori became Port Mafia's boss and Dazai was his right hand, one that Mori feared would choke him in the night. Dazai probably knew. Kyuusaku couldn't imagine the teen not being able to notice the murderous intent from Mori. But they needed each other alive, just like how Mori needed Dazai to keep Kyuusaku in check but also needed Kyuusaku to kill more people for him.

Kyuusaku had a code name then. Q. A letter. Simple. Nothing like a hero's name or even as catchy as a villain's. But weapons didn't need a name. People didn't need to remember Kyuusaku, only the fear of Port Mafia was important.

If they feared Kyuusaku more than they cared for Port Mafia, Mori would put them out of commission first because Kyuusaku wasn't as loyal as Chuuya or Akutagawa. Kyuusaku didn't need a name. They were Q, Port Mafia's Plan Q or the chess piece that would destroy the game.

Kyuusaku supposed they were happy. They were used to people wishing them dead. The pain became bearable eventually, especially when paired with the cries of those who hurt them. Life was fun. People were fun.

Even if the joy was short lived.

But now they found a different way to play. Not every piece of happiness had to be accompanied by pain and blood (even though Kyuusaku secretly still loved the red color on other people a lot).

Humming a song, they ran into the master bedroom atop of Huang Corp's penthouse. Kyuusaku threw open the doors with a heavy thud, ignoring the darkness as they yanked all the curtains open to let sunlight spill through.

And then they stood in front of the bed with its translucent red canopy drawn close. They could see the faint outline of Zeku lying on the wooden bed through the sheer fabric. A long strand of red hair slipped out over the edge of the bed from between the crack of the canopy.

"Dad! There's a creepy old man in my room!" Kyuusaku screamed.

“That’s your new tutor.” The young man flipped over in bed, turning his back towards Kyuusaku. With a voice raspy from sleep, he sounded as if he would doze off again soon.

“I have two already! I don’t need a new one.” Kyuusaku yanked on the blankets and sheets to get to the source of evil. When they realized they couldn’t win in this tug of war, they pulled a piece of paper out from their pocket. “And what’s with the ridiculous time schedule?”

The paper in their hand had every day of the week filled with lessons. Math, sciences, history, languages...it was more comprehensive than most schedules of elite private schools. This was totally a punishment for playing with the hero kids too hard. Kyuusaku didn’t even do much. If the heroes break down from just this one encounter, maybe they shouldn’t be heroes at all.

A deep sigh came from behind the canopy-shrouded bed. Zeku sat up, brushing an edge of the canopy aside and yawned. He was in a black robe with the front hanging open, revealing skin down to his torso. Despite the sort of battles that Kyuusaku knew Zeku went through, most of the young man’s skin remained unmarked by scars. The way that Zeku healed was abnormal but Kyuusaku never asked.

Dad was Dad because he was Dad. One secret more or one secret less wouldn’t change that.

“Strength is everything. That is the way of the Huangs.” He had given up on correcting Kyuusaku about what to call him a long time ago, which Kyuusaku considered a win. A finger tapped between Kyuusaku’s brows lightly, its temperature slightly lower than a normal person’s. “Absolute and without a doubt, a complete dominance no matter the battlefield.”

Meaning, Kyuusaku wasn’t there yet. Their ability only activates when people hurt them physically through contact. Kyuusaku placed their hands on their hips but they smiled. See, Dad was Dad. Mori never cared about Kyuusaku’s studies. The only lesson Mori ever bothered to teach was to ensure Kyuusaku remained obedient. Chuuya was too busy and Dazai would use lessons as excuses to cook up poison so he could die.

Kyuusaku didn’t miss those days.

For a period of time under Mori, Kyuusaku was told to play with outside villains a lot. They broke in the same way as the others but they made more noises. Pops of vibrant colors splattered from their veins. Paper or metal limbs became covered in dents as they smashed and destroyed.

The city lights winked ahead. There were noises in imitation of what Kyuusaku assumed was human language but it didn’t seem to matter. They could go to sleep. Dazai or someone else would collect them back to Mori if they didn’t bleed out beforehand. They would wake up with fresh bandages and a new Dolly in the windowless room.

Hidden away and alone.

They didn’t want to go back.

Many people came after them. The suits under Mori. Henchmen of other gangs. Random thugs and villains that thought they could overpower a child easily. Why would they think any differently? They do it all the time. Just like that hero.

So Kyuusaku cracked them open too, ripping out the worst in everybody who tried to tell them where to be and what to be. More blood dripped down their arms while people burned. As the night descended fully, it made a nice campfire with the screaming music of insanity. Maybe this was what camping would feel like. Flickering embers and people dancing all around, the scent of roasted meat filled the air while fresh blood drained into the dirt.

Rage and fear, violence became boring after a while and the more coldness slipped up Kyuusaku's fingers due to blood loss. Their head was light but their feet heavy. Or maybe it was the other way around. They didn't know anymore because pain could only be numbed until a certain point. Mori said that was why Kyuusaku would never be better than Chuuya or Dazai. They couldn't tune the pain out to focus on the goal.

There was a famous hero amongst the herd. Kyuusaku didn't know how he got here but that was the adults' problem. The Symbol of Peace was no different than the other toys Kyuusaku played with before. Behind the smiles and glorious stories, he was a man with grief and anger all the same. With him in Yokohama, it threw Dazai off Kyuusaku's tail.

As the night dragged on and rivers of red pooled the ground, Kyuusaku made more people dance for them. They played a lot, exploring Yokohama's different corners that Mori never allowed them to go to. It wouldn't be long before they were caught. Kyuusaku always knew that. They weren't going to escape from Port Mafia's grasp and eventually, someone will catch them or kill them. The neighborhood they were in was organized but different, with drying paint and construction sites all around.

The last thing Kyuusaku remembered was seeing the spray paint of a three-eyed white dragon on a garage door.

Kyuusaku woke up to the smell of heavy antiseptics and a white ceiling. At first they thought they were captured by Dazai. The smell of disinfectants, the foggiest of their vision, and the heaviness in their body were all familiar sensations, nothing to be alarmed of. Mori routinely injected Kyuusaku with muscle relaxants and sleeping pills to ensure they were easy to manage under confinement. But the room was too light and there were sounds all around Kyuusaku.

"Doctor Tan, he's awake!" a young voice yelled. "The kid Ikeda-nee kidnapped is awake!"

"I didn't kidnap anybody," a woman snapped.

A deeper voice coughed from a little further away, "Ah yes, you just happened to encounter a bleeding kid in the middle of the night and knocked it out. Gods, Ikeda, I know Zeku-sama doesn't care but you really got to drop some of your old habits. We're supposed to be legal now."

"What good woman doesn't carry around a little paralysis gas?" The woman sounded a little irritated and unapologetic. "Every girl's got to have some pepper spray, bear spray, knuckle

brass, and lock-picking tool in her purse.”

Kyuusaku could see them now. A girl about their age, sickly and small with large cat eyes. She was in a blue hospital gown and there was an IV drip attached to her. The woman had straight dark hair that fell past her hips and a sweet face that didn’t match her coarse speech. The man—presumably Dr. Tan—was scruffy looking.

They said that Kyuusaku needed to meet their boss. Ikeda wheeled Kyuusaku—who was still immobile since Dr. Tan injected them with more medicine—out. The hospital was busy and the building appeared quite new. There was a woman playing the piano in a wing that they passed, surrounded by child patients. Kyuusaku let their head roll limp to the side, seeing how the building was a square with a hollowed out space in the middle for a garden in the center.

The woman didn’t wheel Kyuusaku far.

It was silent in the garden with no one in sight. Orange sweet osmanthus dangled from the trees, where the leaves flicked spots of sun onto the grass beneath, alternating the shape of shade in accordance with the movement of the clouds. A monster rested around the sakura tree in the center, its scales pearlescent and its claws nearly as thick as the tree trunks.

Kyuusaku’s heartbeat rushed against their eardrums as fear and excitement shot through them. Could they curse such a large beast? What would its madness look like?

“Zeku-sama!” Ikeda called out in a gentle voice, not a hint of the shrilly pitch she used with the other two earlier. There was somebody lying on the dragon’s back, hands behind his head and enjoying the good weather.

The boy was older than Kyuusaku but younger than Dazai. Maybe ten or eleven. Dressed in a red Tang suit the same color as his hair and a black military coat, he must be the fool that Mori mentioned before. Some crazy idiot wanted to build a company in Suribachi City. Young and ambitious, the adult gangsters were waiting for him to fail because his dream was impossible. Everything had its place.

Trash should stay at the bottom of the barrel.

Because that was what Suribachi was. Malnourished, uneducated, with pieces missing both internally and externally...this was the place where the useless and dying accumulated. It was a bit troublesome but Mori had no use for it now, most of the reputable gangs didn’t either. There was barely any profit to be made in a place like this.

Huang Zeku had the same eyes as Dazai: Empty and bored.

Ikeda told Huang Zeku about Kyuusaku. The older boy didn’t react much other than asking if the ruckus amongst Port Mafia and the outsiders was Kyuusaku’s doing. When Kyuusaku confirmed, he laid back down with a grunt that Kyuusaku didn’t know how to react to.

Most people would be scared when they heard what Kyuusaku could do, like how Ikeda’s hands on the wheelchair’s handle trembled. But Huang Corp didn’t lock them back up.

Kyuusaku was treated as a patient (with extra caution of course), wheeled around by nurses who warned the other patients in the hospital to not touch Kyuusaku.

Nobody would dress Kyuusaku in razors. The kids were oblivious but they treated Kyuusaku as if they were one of them. Many of them were stuck in the hospital due to some kind of illness but they still played. Drawing together when their bodies were up for it or playing chess from across the room of each other. There were kids stuck behind glass who spoke to them through microphones and older patients who knitted or read story books to them when the nurses were busy. People here knew the risks, they were ill but not without hope, accommodating each other in order to live a little bit easier.

Huang Corp was in the business of changing lives. Not drastically in an instant. Not miracles. Sometimes just a little and other times to give back what people lost. Kyuusaku met many people in the hospital. Gangsters cut three fingers off the woman who played the piano. She played again now with science replacing what she lost. There were men who were learning how to walk with their new legs and artists trying to read colors with new eyes.

They were normal people, the kind that broke easily. Too old, too young, too ugly, and too weak. None of them were anything special and they didn't talk about anything special either. The tattooed security guard yelled at the kids about joining him for muscle training. The old couple couldn't shut up about how they were going to set up a new convenience store once the old man could walk. The man who wore a full face of makeup ranted about magic tricks and there were two janitors who always bicker over who was cooking dinner.

They called Kyuusaku's name, asking them to decide which candy to bring in for the shop or what they thought of pulling rabbits out of a hat. Kyuusaku didn't hate it. Dr. Tan wheeled them to the entrance of Suribachi once, saying Kyuusaku could leave if they wanted since they were healed. Nobody was going to hold them in Suribachi. Kyuusaku stayed because they were curious. Why were the people here different from the rest of Yokohama? Why were they happy when Kyuusaku was not?

Ikeda said that it was because Huang Zeku didn't care. Suribachi took a child as its leader, a child who wouldn't touch the girls like the old men used to do. A child who didn't weigh the people's organs by the ounce in exchange for wealth. He dismantled many of the old rules as he amassed power, even if he didn't care for who it hurt or who it saved along the way, the changes were for the better. Follow his rules and they would live. Being a piece of the dragon's trove guaranteed at least a bit of security than kissing up to others who might not even be as strong.

As long as they followed the rules, the Dragon wouldn't care and life was good.

So Kyuusaku watched. There were scientists who followed after Huang Zeku, talking about numbers and big technical terms. Ikeda and other women ran about the newly built office with budgets and schedules and piles of paperwork waiting to be approved. Battles were common too. Gangsters and revenge-seekers who thought a boy had no right to rule, people who came to take as they pleased because that was how Yokohama had always been.

They ended up as dragon feed.

A few more days later the famous Double Black was sent to retrieve Kyuusaku. Huang Corp put up absolutely no resistance or disdain. The guards at the front opened the lobby door for them and the receptionist processed them in as she would any other client. The secretaries took Kyuusaku into the office.

“You sure enjoyed a great show, didn’t you?” snarled Chuuya. He was mad and if Mori hadn’t given him the order to bring Kyuusaku back alive, he would have leveled them already. The orange haired teen scowled at Huang Zeku, who sat at the desk without any expression. Huang Zeku was still short, his legs barely able to reach the ground as he twirled the end of his tassel earring with a bored look.

“Was it not All Might who injured your subordinates? Was it not the outside villains who took their lives? Huang Corp had nothing to do with it. Take the kid if you want.” Huang Zeku yawned, leaning his head on one hand as the dragon laid at his feet. It snorted, spraying a steam of hot air against Dazai, who tried to take a step closer.

Kyuusaku couldn’t say they were disappointed by the response. Nobody ever wanted them for the long run.

“That easy?” asked Dazai.

Huang Zeku didn’t answer. The woman beside him did. “The second you set foot out of this building, we’ll call the police.”

Her voice was slightly shaking but she pressed on even under Chuuya’s stare, “You mafia never bothered with the paperwork and imprisoned a child all this time. It’s only logical for them to want to run. Port Mafia’s boss has a preference for little girls under the age of twelve. His men just barged into our office and took the company’s new ward.” She held up a stack of paper, a transfer of guardianship signed by Kyuusaku’s birth parents and agreed to an adoption.

“How can a law-abiding small business owner like myself ever say no? I’m terrified,” Huang Zeku added. Although his words were those of surrender, his tone remained neutral and his body relaxed. He was reading from a script and everybody knew it.

“You’re underage, you can’t adopt someone else,” protested Chuuya. The dragon raised its head upon hearing his raise in volume.

“I’m not adopting anyone. The kids are the company’s wards.”

“Those fucking charities you set up! I knew it was—”

“Chuuya, back off.” Dazai’s cold voice interrupted whatever rant Chuuya was about to unleash. The dark haired teen met Huang Zeku’s eyes, soullessly dark met malicious evil. Slowly, Dazai shook his head. “A petty opportunist, aren’t you?”

Huang Zeku laughed, a cold and cruel sound that would put heroes to their knees in terror. The office ladies sometimes mentioned that he would grow up to be a handsome man. Long lashes and pale skin, his hair lengthening as time passed. However, most of Huang Corp’s

enemies would say that boy was the devil reincarnated with his teeth sharp and his lips red as if he drank blood. "Karma is a wonderful pesticide."

Kyuusaku was taken from Port Mafia out of vengeance. The only purpose was to disgust Mori and be a pain in the ass for the mafia in general. Port Mafia's boss could be known as cold and cruel or even wicked and wrong but he couldn't be a pervert without boundaries. If he wanted to control Yokohama's darkness, he couldn't be as unruly as the previous boss who would order for death as one would drain shots in a bar. Besides, Mori's hold on Port Mafia was still relatively new and there were men who resented his rise of status. It wasn't wise to give the law an excuse to come after Mori, forcing them to deal with both internal stifles and external threats simultaneously. Besides, even excluding Huang Corp, there were still other ability users and organizations eyeing Port Mafia's throne. No matter how strong Chuuya and Dazai were together, they couldn't fight a war on all fronts.

Dazai was always good at making logical decisions. Kyuusaku had seen him done it, knew how the calculations filtered through the older boy's head.

When placed on a scale, Mori's hold to his position was worth much more than Kyuusaku.

Plans and aces could be replaced, especially a last resort option like Kyuusaku.

"Fine," Dazai said with a shrug. "You won this hand and a hot potato with iron spikes really. Enjoy your prize."

And Kyuusaku was someone else's problem but their new guardian was far too busy with numbers and meetings and fake limbs.

Huang Zeku didn't care but it was because he didn't care that he was safe. He didn't push Kyuusaku to kill and Kyuusaku had to follow the same rules everybody else followed—don't cause trouble and don't touch what was Huang Zeku's.

It was just because of Kyuusaku's ability that they got to live inside Huang Corp. The most dangerous place was the safest place. Or an insurance policy if anybody cared. Kyuusaku liked it here. They got treats from the employees and always have people to play with. Homework wasn't much fun but slowly, they knew they were becoming less and less of a replaceable plan Q and more and more Kyuusaku.

It wasn't bad.

"If you're done throwing a tantrum, get out."

Pulling themselves out of memories, Kyuusaku stuck their tongue out as they jumped onto the bed. "I'm not throwing a tantrum. I'm reasonably upset!"

Kyuusaku's hand touched someone's wrist. But that was impossible. Both of Zeku's hands were visible.

There was someone else in bed.

They nearly jumped and scaled up the side of the bed's pillar out of shock but their instincts took over. Kyuusaku yanked the duvet away, wishing they had mistaken a pillow or extra blanket but saw blond hair instead.

There was someone else in the Dragon's bed.

Zeku shoved Kyuusaku down the bed, letting the latter land on a giant pillow that Coiled Dragon fetched over to break their fall. The beast wasn't as large as it was in battle, taking on a more medium size that made it about as large as two couches as it caught Kyuusaku with the pillow. It licked them, rough tongue sticky wet against their skin.

"Y-You-That's the UA guy! How did-why-What?" Kyuusaku stared at the blond teen. Bakugou Katsuki was trying his best to not laugh but his shaking shoulders gave him away. Also, he was dressed in Zeku's pajamas. *At least they were fully clothed.* As soon as the thought popped into their head, Kyuusaku shuddered. Pushing Coiled Dragon's snout away, Kyuusaku struggled to sit upright. "Get away from my dad!"

Bakugou Katsuki started laughing.

"Stop laughing! What did you do to him? You're supposed to only have an explosion quirk!" yelled Kyuusaku but Bakugou only laughed harder. His cheeks were flushed pink from how hard he was laughing while Zeku groaned in exasperation.

"Quiet," Zeku ordered while raising a hand to stop Kyuusaku from grabbing Bakugou from the floor. He grabbed Bakugou's face with his other hand, squeezing the blond's mouth shut. "You too."

"What's he doing in the penthouse?" Kyuusaku pointed at the blond accusingly. "He's supposed to be our hostage!"

Hostages got locked up and chained. They shouldn't be in the master bedroom!

"I am a hostage," chirped Bakugou as he struggled free of Zeku's hold. He even slipped under Zeku's arm, lying over the dark haired young man's lap to greet Kyuusaku with a smile. "Morning!"

"You're in my dad's bed!"

"Yes. I think I know that."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was sleeping."

"Get off the bed!"

"Nah, I don't think so, kid."

Bakugou leaned his chin on Zeku's thigh, reaching a hand out to tap Kyuusaku on the nose gently. His eyes were smiling and gods did Kyuusaku want to curse someone right now.

“Nice to finally meet you. I heard you can be quite the troublemaker.”

Kyuusaku had never been in a situation like this before. Pouting, they looked up at Zeku with watery eyes. “Dad! I don’t like him. Can I kill him?”

Chuckling, Bakugou turned his head to smile coyly at Zeku. “Hear that, Zeku? I’m so disheartened. Kyuusaku’s asking for you.”

Zeku sighed as Coiled Dragon’s tail wrapped around Kyuusaku’s waist to keep them on the ground. The dragon’s master pulled Katsuki up by the back of his collar before pressing their lips together. Bakugou’s eyes grew wide but the hand at the back of his neck pinned him in place. They were kissing. With tongue.

That was disgusting. They must be hallucinating right now. Maybe they never got out of bed and this was a bad dream. Why else would Dad be kissing a hero kid?

Kyuusaku’s mouth hung open, wide enough to swallow an apple whole. Their vision blacked out for a second as Coiled Dragon placed a claw over their line of sight but Kyuusaku could still see the kiss happening through the cracks between the dragon’s claws.

After what seemed like centuries or a flash of lightning, Zeku pulled away, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. Before getting off the bed, he said to Kyuusaku, “Manners.”

Bakugou’s face was fully flustered and his breathing labored. Embarrassed with a bit of anger, a small pop of explosions went off in his palm. “Zeku!”

“Why are you telling me to behave? *He* is the one who's in the wrong place!” Kyuusaku shrieked.

“You said you wanted one.” Zeku gave them both a tired look of how he had stopped listening and wasn’t open to arguments. “Meet your mom, Kyuusaku. Or second dad. Doesn't really matter but if he’s missing even a single hair for any reason, you’re grounded for life.”

And all Kyuusaku could hear was their own silent internal screaming.

Chapter End Notes

Comments motivate me ٩(‘ڭ`)و I'll get around to answering the comments later...got other things going on in life right now

Thanks for reading!

Update: Added a bit more to Kyuusaku's backstory in this chap

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

WARNING: BSD Spoilers.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Something evil had entered their home and Kyuusaku was very much offended—not *scared*—by its malicious presence.

The usual was served for breakfast: A savory diet of traditional cuisine with rice and miso soup, the sides were white pickled radish and tamagoyaki. Grilled eel was on the table too, drenched in a sweet and salty glaze of brown sauce. The meat had been cooked to perfection, crispy on the edges but still held a tenderness on the inside. Everything was just the way Dad liked it but they weren't from the usual professional chef's hands.

This food must be poisoned.

Seated across from Kyuusaku, Bakugou Katsuki was dressed in a white T-shirt and shorts. The black silk magua jacket had an embroidery of red kois along the sleeves. It fitted him well and he rolled up the sleeves so it was easier to work in, especially around a stove.

...Okay, so maybe Kyuusaku should be a little scared.

Why do they have clothing in the hero guy's size?

Technically, Bakugou wasn't that different in size from Zeku. A few centimeters shorter maybe and a different build of muscles because of obvious differences in training and combat preferences.

Still, *why* do they have clothing in the hero guy's size?

Which traitor bought it? Did one of the aunties in the office know about this?

Huang Zeku was dating.

Dad was dating.

Dad shouldn't be dating. He should be devouring annoying suitors whole like how Coiled Dragon snacked on roasted chicken! Not even spitting out bones afterward swallowing.

It must be some kind of hypnosis. Or maybe Zeku had been poisoned and this was a delirium of some toxic effect.

“Kyuusaku.”

The child flinched but across the table, Zeku didn't appear angry or out of his mind, which only made Kyuusaku more nervous. Dad looked so normal. The same cold stare, expressionless face and bored tone...everything about him was nothing out of the ordinary.

“Don't waste food.”

Kyuusaku hummed, piling the vegetables over the fish before hastily shoving a piece of it into their mouth. They didn't bother chewing, choosing to swallow it down as quickly as they could and wait for the impending doom of being poisoned to death.

A few seconds later, they were still alive and so was Zeku.

Zeku poured coffee for Bakugou. The brown liquid filled an orange and black cat shaped mug—Kyuusaku's mug. Well, technically Kyuuaku got it for Zeku (the security guards helped them pick it out) but the older man had never used it before. Now someone else was using it.

This wouldn't do.

Kyuusaku didn't think that any of the hero students had more battle experience than the Yokohama residents. Being a natural (if the outside media's commentary during the Sports Festival was true) was one thing, fighting in real life was a whole different matter. Yet, Zeku was clear that if Kyuusaku tried anything, they would be the one in trouble.

That was unfair.

Bakugou smiled at Kyuusaku, his grin as smug as the curve of the stupid cat's. It had been cute when Kyuusaku bought it but now it was a tainted piece of junk.

Their stomach turned as if it was a ball of spaghetti being twisted around a fork.

When they finished breakfast, Kyuusaku was the one who did the dishes. They didn't want to but they were too shocked at the hint of smile on Zeku's face before the latter went downstairs for work.

Dad *smiled*.

Not mockingly. Not threateningly. Not out of cruel or sadistic joy.

Kyuusaku might be sick. Something was seriously wrong with the world.

The source of all the trouble sat in Zeku's chair, sipping tea from Kyuusaku's mug as Coiled Dragon laid in his lap. Coiled Dragon *never* let anybody beside its owner touch it, let alone pet it as if it was a domesticated breed. Kyuusaku rarely saw Coiled Dragon out in its smaller form too. Usually, the menacing monster was a hellish sight, giant and overwhelming in appearance behind its master. The few times Kyuusaku saw the energy-saving version of it, it was curled over Zeku's shoulders, still ready to chew off a man's whole arm if they got too close.

Now the stupid lizard was on its tummy with its claws carefully retracted, purring with bliss.

Traitor.

Stupid, stupid lizard. They should have fried lizard for dinner tonight.

Kyuusaku dragged a tall stool over and slumped down in front of the blond. “How?” they gritted the question through their teeth.

“Pen pals. Online dating. Love at first sight. Which reason would you like?” Bakugou had this smug look on his face that was cursed. No wonder the outside media doesn’t like him during the sports festival.

“I’m asking you a serious question.”

“And I’m giving you a serious answer. Which lie will you believe?”

What did Dad see in him?

A pretty face? Sure. Maybe. On TV, Bakugou often had a serious face or some kind of scowl that twisted his features. Now that he appeared calm and wasn’t swearing louder than police sirens, he was actually beautiful. A fascinating quirk? If Zeku loved or appreciated explosions so much, he wouldn’t have nearly killed the lemon bomber. They had plenty of choices in Yokohama too. Girls and boys and a lot of in between, every style possible and every body type there was. People who actually understood Yokohama instead of a hero wannabe.

Zeku hadn’t chosen any of them. Why would he care for an outsider now?

But an outsider shouldn’t know Zeku’s habits like the back of his hand. Bakugou walked inside their home unbounded and unsupervised, used Zeku’s stuff and seemed familiar with where everything was placed. Most importantly, Coiled Dragon liked Bakugou.

Coiled Dragon *never* liked any humans.

Kyuusaku could get stray cats and other pets to feed from their hands or touch them but Coiled Dragon never let anybody else touch it just for fun, especially without its master present. It growled and hissed, biting people’s fingers off or suddenly enlarging itself to slice those it deemed annoying in half. Ugly and grumpy, it hated it when people or animals tried to approach Zeku too. After a lengthy history of bribery and other petty battles, it barely tolerated Kyuusaku.

But now it put up absolutely no fight as Bakugou scratched its chin and rubbed its tummy. Its multiple eyes were half-lidded and it purred as if enjoying the touch. Kyuusaku had no idea how Bakugou adored it like it was a fluffy pet either. While Kyuusaku thought of Coiled Dragon as a stupid lizard, ANY lizard would be cuter than it in reality.

Its scales were too bumpy and pale. It had too many eyes, some large and other small over a too large head. Its claws, when shrunk down, resembled miniature human hands instead of

reptilian ones. No matter how anybody looked at it, it was a foul looking lizard at best and a horrendously deformed fetus from the other angle.

“You know Dad,” Kyuusaku said. This familiarity wouldn’t have popped out of nowhere.

“Yes.”

“He never told me.”

“Has he really told you much of anything?”

No.

Zeku wasn’t known for talking. He was busy with work too and Kyuusaku had all the homework or other lessons to catch up on. Mori didn’t exactly care to provide the supposed well-rounded education that children should have. Kyuusaku wasn’t illiterate when they first came under Huang Corp’s care but they were behind in a variety of areas or required training. ~~Not killing everybody they don’t like being one thing.~~

“He tells me plenty of things,” lied Kyuusaku. It wasn’t really a lie. Outside of the sciency people in the white robes and the secretaries, Zeku talked to Kyuusaku the most. Occasionally, they shared a meal together or played a game of go. Sometimes if Zeku was in a better mood, Kyuusaku liked to drag a bean bag and some books into the older man’s office, occupying a space there while he worked.

“I’m sure he does.” There it was again, the weird smile on Bakugou’s face as if he saw through Kyuusaku’s thoughts.

Reaching out, Kyuusaku pulled on Coiled Dragon’s tail but the beast was stuck to Bakugou like chewed gum. It even slapped Kyuusaku’s hand away before climbing up Bakugou’s shirt to whine against his chest like it suffered some great injustice. Bakugou cooed at it, babying an abnormality as if it was a puppy. Zeku liked him. Coiled Dragon liked him. Bakugou liked them back.

He really could be “mom”.

What a nightmare.

Kyuusaku was certain now: They don’t actually want a second parent.

Their biological parents didn’t want them. Mori provided for Kyuusaku but he wasn’t their dad. Dazai barely wanted to keep himself alive so he was no parent either. Chuuya...Chuuya was nice at one point but he wanted to kill Kyuusaku now. The orange haired man cared more for the subordinates that worked under him than the last resort Mori held in confinement. There were others of course, seasoned killers and trained professionals. The broken and the unwell, people who spent more time talking about their woes and warning Kyuusaku to not make the same mistakes or damning them to be doomed.

Those people certainly talked a lot more than Zeku but it was the Dragon who came to rescue Kyuusaku when Guild kidnapped them. One man from Francis’s crew had taken Kyuusaku,

connecting them to the plant roots underneath Yokohama with his ability. While the citizens in Yokohama went about their day, gardening or stepping over grass, they were unknowingly cursed by Kyuusaku's ability.

Kyuusaku had held out then, enduring the pain of roots traveling up their veins and the sharpness stinging their skin as people broke and cut branches in their gardens. They were oblivious of the pain they were causing. It hurted so much. Stupid people and the Guild's stupid plans. Everytime a weed was pulled from the park, it felt as if one of Kyuusaku's nails had been plucked. The weight of footsteps on grass turned into a crushing force, squeezing Kyuusaku's organs under invisible pressure. No words could describe the amount of pain as the whole city sliced and cut into Kyuusaku. They remembered it being too much, remembered how their limbs spasmed involuntarily but couldn't struggle out from the wood crucifying them against the wall. Their legs were pinched tight by twisting veins and bark grew over their torso. Tears streamed down their face as every part of them contracted tighter. Tighter and tighter, until their heart seemed to be ready to pop out of their throat or their eyes would explode inside their skull.

It was too much.

The blond kidnapper was talking about the unfairness of the world and the cruelty of adults with sad eyes. He didn't want to torture children but he commanded the plants deeper into Kyuusaku, connecting the child to more and more parts of the city. The Incineration of Yokohama. His employer wanted to burn this city down and Kyuusaku was how they would do it.

Curse him.

Why Kyuusaku? Always. All the bad things always happened to Kyuusaku. They didn't ask for any of this, not this ability and not this fate but misfortune always managed to catch up. What a horrendous world and a horrid curse. The man watched Kyuusaku with pity, announcing that God didn't love the atrocity of their curse.

Curse him.

But what Guild miscalculated was that eventually, someone will come get Kyuusaku. Maybe Chuuya would come under Mori's orders. The man had full control of Port Mafia now that he could take Kyuusaku back, whether it be to continue to use their curse or to execute them for disgracing his authority back then. Traitors would meet their fates in a bloody end. Mori always got even. Or Dazai and the detectives would do something. They wouldn't let their beloved city go to shit.

Kyuusaku was an object to be retrieved or a nuisance to be stopped. The means to an end. A product with a price. Q. Always just Q as part of a plan.

No one ever came for just Kyuusaku. No hero ever did and no criminal ever would.

Curse them.

Curse them.

Curse this messed up world.

But if they did, they might kill granny and Ikeda and everybody else, destroying what Suribachi worked so hard to build. Kyuusaku wanted to eat the cafeteria chef's new dishes, play with the orphanage kids, get candy from the secretary ladies, prank the scientists in the lab, and run away while the security guard yelled profanities or when their tutors chided them over the speakers. Weak. Normal. People like that won't stand a chance against Kyuusaku's ability but they were not so rotten in this rotten world.

Kyuusaku really wanted to go home.

Then Zeku showed up on a motorcycle. He shoved something into the kidnappers' mouths and Coiled Dragon dunked them into the pond just outside of where Guild was keeping Kyuusaku captive before tossing them far away.

"Fancy seeing you beating us to the punch," Dazai whistled when he arrived with Chuuya. Port Mafia and ADA must have teamed up then. "What did you feed them?"

"Industrial grade foam that expands with moisture," answered Zeku coldly while he slung Kyuusaku over his shoulder.

Chuuya made a strangled noise. "...And you waterboarded them. Also, where did you come from? You look like shit."

The teen's hair was hastily tied back with a rubber band instead of a proper hair tie. Loose strands of red hair fell over his neck and some even poked unevenly out from beneath the rubber, sticking up in random directions. The plain T-shirt had stains of ink and marks while his joggers were wrinkly as dried seaweed.

Zeku grunted about work before he stomped past the two men, hauling Kyuusaku along. He was far from a man, still a teenager with growing bones that dug into Kyuusaku's stomach uncomfortably. He wasn't gentle either, never rescuing people with warm smiles or had any words of comfort to offer anybody. But it didn't matter because when Kyuusaku asked why he came for them, he answered—

"It's Tuesday."

Tuesday was headcount day. Huang Corp's guards started counting kids every week because children were often targets, especially in a place like Yokohama. They went door to door and to schools in Suribachi during patrol, checking up on the children to make sure no one vanished. A list was then given to Zeku's secretaries. They weeded out the ones who left for jobs or moved, noting down the runaways who had unusual dreams to chase or chose different lives.

And they would find the rest because nobody touched what belonged to the dragon.

Somebody came for Kyuusaku, just Kyuusaku. Not for power and not to stop a disaster, just because Kyuusaku went missing.

“You’re mean. And cold.” They sniffled short and choppy sentences into the older boy’s long hair. The pain from the plants must be lingering. Otherwise, they didn’t know how to describe the pulse inside their chest, burning too hot to be a heartbeat. “You’re going to die a lonely and grumpy old man. I’ll let you be my dad then at least someone will pick your bones into a grave when you die.”

Their words were met with silence but they expected it. They had used the term before, calling the one who provided food and shelter and education a parent as a joke to annoy him or raise any reaction other than a cold stare.

But they meant it this time.

“I’ll find a mommy too so you won’t be alone,” Kyuusaku suggested, knowing the proposal would be met with great resistance or disgust.

“I’m not alone.”

“A giant man-eating lizard doesn’t count.”

Zeku dropped the helmet on them, pressing it down on their head roughly. “Shut up.”

The teen started the engines, kicking the motorbike into drive. Kyuusaku wrapped their arms around Zeku’s waist, feeling the wind rushed past them because Zeku had no regard for speed limits. The end of his ponytail whipped against Kyuusaku’s skin and strands of it pressed against their face. It was itchy but they laughed and kept calling the teen dad until they accidentally caught a bug with their mouth. While coughing, Kyuusaku remembered feeling the rumbling of a chuckle underneath their hands.

At that moment, the dragon’s heart was cold but his skin was warmer than dusk burning bright in the sky.

Chuuya made fun of Zeku's appearance. The messy hair and the disheveled look certainly wasn’t like his normal presentation. But the mafia won’t have known that Zeku usually slept in the laboratory instead of a bedroom. A mattress propped up on a piece of wood, where pipes and wires crossed everywhere, connected to engines and machines and computers. Scattered paper and equation-filled whiteboards, that was where the teen spent most of his time.

Kyuusaku could almost imagine it. How the teen still had a pen stuck behind one of his ears when the reports came. He’d grab a quick bite and something to drink while the assistants read off the missing kids’ names, bringing out items that belonged to the kid for Coiled Dragon to learn a scent. The computers were still running in the background, ding ding dong dong with many beeps as the clogs of machines turned and other scientists chatting quietly. Squishy fake flesh bubbled inside their tanks as Zeku swept up a random rubber band for his hair. Someone tossed him the motorcycle key as the elevator opened.

Nobody breaks the rules in Suribachi City.

They built this. He built this.

Suribachi belonged to no one else.

“I won’t accept you into this family!” Kyuusaku yelled with a raised fist, finally sorted out why they disliked Bakugou. “Suribachi doesn’t need an outsider. Get out of my house!”

Kyuusaku didn’t hate the idea of having a second parent. They didn’t hate the possibility of Zeku finding love or a partner. What they hated was the thought of someone else coming in to harvest the success that Suribachi had grown. All the people and all their late nights, every drop of tear and sweat that they put into building this place...Kyuusaku didn’t want anybody to just randomly come reap the benefits of it.

This was their home, not a stage for heroics or a dollhouse for fleeting adoration.

Those who didn’t understand Yokohama’s sins don’t belong at its top.

Yanking Coiled Dragon out from under Bakugou’s grasp, Kyuusaku pivoted around in a hurry and bolted out the door. If they cared to listen or slowed down a few steps, they would have heard Bakugou laugh.

“See, people can change without needing any outside force.” He looked up at the ceiling, where a calico cat leaped down from the ceiling beam, landing on the coffee table. It dipped its head as Bakugou brought the now cold cup to his lips. The blond teen drank and the cold liquid burned his tongue, suppressing the heat bubbling up as his emotions were high strung. “Is this Yokohama better than a lonely old man’s dream?”

The cat meowed as if in agreement.

Chapter End Notes

Short things lately...I hate this bleeding setting that activates itself once a month. I got work to get done!!

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

IDK why there are so many things to be done irl...but since BNHA ended, I think I need to start filling some of the holes I dug by starting fics. BTW, I have to scream about Zeku's dad in canon manga. Oh no, he's hot too and not the type of person I implied in Coiled Dragon. Now I have to round out a few things to make it make sense in this fic, LOL.

Anyhow, have fun reading and leave a comment/kudo/bookmark if you'd like. Thanks!

Kyuusaku was the kid All Might warned Midoriya about, the one who caused villains and mafia to descend into madness.

He should have noticed sooner. The clues were right in front of their class; How Kyuusaku talked in such cheerful manners after almost getting robbed, skipping happily ahead of the group and conversing with huge smiles. The way that a child could wander off with a large sum of cash without any guardians or precautions...it all made sense now.

But it was too late.

After being carried back to ADA, Ojirou had a high fever and he was dragged into Dr. Yosano's office. Something happened behind closed doors. The thin doors couldn't stop the noise of industrial chainsaws and drills...which Midoriya had no idea how or why that would be a part of normal medical procedures.

But Ojirou was healed, physically at least.

"I-I don't really know what happened," Ojirou told them. The shakiness in his voice showed how he was still trying to regain his normal self. "I saw villains and monsters. It's like they just appeared out of nowhere and started attacking us. T-Then...you guys started dying in front of me when the orange-haired mafia showed up. He crushed us under gravity."

Kyuusaku's ability made Ojirou see the worst of nightmares. He saw Midoriya and the others being beaten bloody. Villains came after them, slicing skin off Yaoyorozu's arms and sticking knives into Shoji's eyes. They ripped everyone apart into a mangled mess until eventually, the orange haired Port Mafia executive appeared to crush them all as promised. However, the madness didn't stop there. Just as Ojirou thought he was dead, the world flashed alive again. He was in the center of a crowd.

There, the faceless silhouettes of his past emerged.

His deepest fears, most dreaded secrets, any insecurities that they beared, and each past failures or regrets took the form of monsters, clawing their way out of the shadowy depths of Ojirou's heart. Perhaps the issues were trivial or even manageable normally, just little thorns that dug into his flesh. Stinging and prickly but ultimately no more than a scabbing scar that time had or would have healed. Yet, under Kyuusaku's ability, even the most harmless of intrusive thoughts morphed into a disastrous storm in their own heads.

Ojirou was trapped inside his body. The invisible wounds dormant inside his bones ripping him open from within.

Psychological quirks were rare. One that could inflict so many people at once and activate together for a lasting impact was practically unheard of outside of movies and fiction. Not to mention, there didn't seem to be any significant drawbacks for Kyuusaku to activate it. The child wasn't immediately drained of stamina or exhausted anything notable, they didn't even appear strained mentally.

The only disadvantage that Kyuusaku's ability showed was that they needed to have physical contact with a pin prick of pain.

Midoriya also felt terrible about what happened to Bakugou and Shinsou. He felt like it was his fault, even though all the evidence pointed to the fact that Huang Corp must have been targeting them since the beginning, well before Midoriya snatched the doll from Kyuusaku. It was a trap, where Midoriya and his peers were being manipulated into a corner.

Class B was reviewing the surveillance footage from the stores around Huang Corp. Even with so many pairs of eyes, there was so much data that inspecting all of the videos for clues and suspicious activities would take hours on end.

Class A had been going out in smaller groups to canvas for information. Some of them went to talk to local shop owners and others to libraries and police stations in the company of ADA. It was so jarring to find out that Huang Corp filed a stolen item report with the police.

They couldn't ask the police for help with a kidnapped teenager but the law accepted a report of a stolen item without a description or estimated value.

Midoriya and his friends thought they understood the dangers of organized crime but to see it in person...it was as if a bomb had exploded inside their heads, leaving them shell shocked and to pick up shattered pieces of their brains. One word from Huang Corp and the citizens or other organizations heeded it as a command. Or perhaps, they didn't even need to be told what was to be done. People make inferences and catch up on what lies needed to be told or when to turn a blind eye like it was an instinct carved in their DNA.

What the UA students couldn't figure out was why Huang Corp would target them when there wasn't anything to gain. More specifically, Huang Zeku didn't appear to want to kill them either. The older teen was more...curious if Midoriya dared to say, like a bored child ripping the wings off dragonflies or pinning insects under magnifying glasses. He was probing for a reaction, which none of them knew if it was a good or bad thing.

The detectives weren't much help after Class A was given the quest. Sometimes, Midoriya felt as if some of them didn't care if Kacchan was kidnapped or not. They either belatedly showed some urgency or were rushing to handle other cases.

"Huang specifically requested for you to solve this," Dazai brushed them off. Besides Atsushi, the older detectives all seemed quite disappointed in Midoriya and the others. ADA told them of the rules of this special city. The constant warnings and reminders were almost overbearing. It felt as if they were more upset about the heroes breaking some arbitrary rules than a student in possible danger.

In reality, Yokohama was the one forcing their hand.

Something wasn't adding up.

"Something isn't adding up."

Iida stood at the end of the table. His hair was disheveled and like the rest of them, there were crescent shades of green and purple under his eyes from the restless sleep. In fact, Midoriya was pretty sure none of them got any proper shut eyes ever since their return from Suribachi.

"Let's go over what happened again," Iida was saying, "we went to Suribachi and we know that Kyuusaku targeted us. Here's the first question then; why did the detectives say Suribachi is safe when Kyuusaku resides there?"

It was strange. How could a corner of Yokohama be the safest of all the territories when a child who had no problem causing mayhem lived there?

"Maybe it's because the dragon and Kyuusaku were there that made Suribachi safe to the locals?" Mina suggested. "It's obvious Kyuusaku and the others kind of...hate outsiders?"

But that was pretty much the rest of Yokohama. At least, Midoriya and the others didn't feel fully welcomed here. They were tolerated, almost like a school project or a hassle that the Yokohama locals were forced to deal with.

"They hate us," someone else grumbled in a tired voice.

"This would be so much easier with our quirks."

True. Whether it was canvassing the city or other tasks, it would be faster if they could use their quirks.

"The point is," Iida continued on, even though he appeared exhausted too. "To Yokohama, Kyuusaku is safe even if they can cause mass hysteria. Huang Zeku is a good guy. Although he kidnapped someone, he's not endangering lives openly, so to the detectives, he's not an immediate threat. The mafia can set up their base in the heart of downtown because there's a trade off with the law to keep peace. See, there's a pattern to how they think. The people of this city are operating based on a set of rules that's a universal normal to them, like how most people would stop at a red light."

Yaoyorozu gulped, seeming to catch on. “And we don’t. They’re targeting us because we reacted differently. They’re trying to see what our normal is in these situations.”

Sucking in a quiet breath, Midoriya felt a pounding inside his chest. They grew up in a quirk society, with heroes and villains and many more moral tales. His schoolmates might be from different backgrounds and households that varied in socioeconomic statuses but they all made it into UA. They were training to be the next generation of heroes, to be future leaders.

Their reactions were a condensed reflection of how people on the outside would act in dire situations.

“How does that help us find the dragon pearl?” Tokage asked.

“What he is trying to say is that we aren’t asking the right questions—or that we aren’t asking them in the *right* way”—Kendo was the one who answered but she was looking at Iida. “—and that is why we’re getting the runaround from the Huang Corp employees and everybody else.”

“Exactly.” Iida gestured towards all of them. “We’re obviously not from here. We’ve been following the detectives and police so they all know we’re from the outside. Nobody trusts us enough to talk to us. Also, we didn’t provide the right keywords for them to begin trusting us. We have to decipher how to approach the locals in the way they are familiar with or we need to find a rule breaker who doesn’t want to conform to Yokohama’s rules.”

A round of applause came from the door.

“Congrats on figuring the first step out.” Dazai was at the door. Midoriya really was starting to develop a reflexive nausea at the sight of the man’s smile.

“You knew all along we’re going at it wrong and didn’t tell us?” Kaminari was enraged and the other Class A boys also glared at the dark haired detective.

“What is wrong with you?” Mina also protested loudly as she slammed the table. “We’ve lost hours of critical time! Bakugou might be back here with us right now!”

The anger was boiling the room, so concrete and vivid as if there was a hearth of burning coal raking over the whole ground.

But Dazai wasn’t one bit fazed by the rising tension.

The man took a languid step forward. His smile was ever so unnerving. Midoriya knew what was off with Dazai’s smile now that he had a moment to study it without distractions. The man’s smile was plastered on, less than a polite mask because he didn’t even put in any effort to fake it. Also, his eyes were too dark, two bottomless voids that mirrored nothing back.

“Actually, you decided that your friend’s safety took priority.” Dazai lifted one finger as if pointing to some invisible presentation behind him. “So you rushed to do everything that is right. Sort through information, gather evidence, interview witnesses...but you forgot to consider perspectives. The detectives of ADA know and have worked with the locals, the

people here trust us. Our agency's name is the foundation of our investigations. The public on the outside trusts heroes, so you never had any issues with them not running over each other to tell you all they know. Your uniform is why they care. Here, all that is meaningless. You've done everything right but forgotten who you are."

Midoriya felt his throat constricted. After he entered UA, people were nicer to him. Not just his new friends and classmates, but the public in general. Random people would cheer him on after the first year's debut in the sports festival, grannies who let him through the station first so he wouldn't be late for class, and so many other instances that his friends and him all went through. The glances in the streets, the sound of cameras and stares or smiles encountered during internships...all of it wasn't because he was simply Midoriya Izuku but because he was associated with something else.

"As for Bakugou, I have Huang's word that Huang Corp won't kill him. Don't think I didn't do anything while you were scrambling around." Dazai wasn't smiling any more and his voice was almost a monotone but somehow, Midoriya could feel him jeering. "Negotiations take time."

"Y-You're," Kirishima took a deep breath before remembering how to string a sentence together. "You're just going to take a kidnapper's word for it?"

"Yes." The sharp dip of the man's tone held so much certainty that Midoriya felt a shudder. "Huang Zeku isn't a good guy but his words are more concrete than stone. That is how he has Suribachi in his grasp. He never promises what he can't give."

"If he's not going to kill Bakugou, what is he doing with him?" Monoma suddenly asked. The pale blue monitor light painted dark shadows under his eyes. "Why is he making us find something that doesn't feel like it even exists?"

"Yeah, a dragon pearl? It's like finding the island of demons that Momotaro went to!"

"But it's not a myth. You saw the dragon yourselves. Also, it's because Bakugou isn't what's important. It can be you or the purple-haired kid or Mr. Class President here." Dazai made a wide motion with his hand. "He is testing the rest of you and you're"—he paused dramatically,—"failing. Not a great look for hero society if you're what they consider the best potentials."

"So he's mocking us."

"Pretty much."

The slight stabbing pain from his nails digging into his palms was what kept Midoriya restrained.

"Why did you tell Monoma and the others that you were the one who tested out Kyuusaku's ability?" he asked but his voice didn't sound like his. It might be the lack of sleep or how he had been sitting in an air conditioned room for too long. Midoriya wanted to go scavenge for clues but Oda suggested strongly against it. The teen had touched Kyuusaku's doll. While they didn't find any of the cursed marks on him, like Tokoyami, he shouldn't be out in the streets. "You are Port Mafia."

The whole room seemed to be encased in ice. Dazai's expression didn't change but his pale skin and dark eyes under the cold office light made every curve of his feature appear much more sinister.

"*Were,*" corrected Dazai. "I'm not involved in that life any more. What is it that you people call it? Right! I'm rehabilitated now."

He even had a warm smile and formed a heart with his hands over his chest. Midoriya recognized the pose and tilt of his head as an imitation of an ad from outside of Yokohama. Heroes weren't just running around the streets beating up bad guys all the time. They also did commercials and advertisements or endorsed public outreach programs. There were those who invested in childcare and others who advocated for animal rights. Of course, working with smaller villains to turn criminals into better people wasn't an uncommon thing either. Prisons had programs that partnered with heroes.

The law was fair. No one should get the death penalty for stealing bubblegum from a convenience store. Some people deserved a second chance.

Midoriya seriously doubted that Dazai was one of them.

"You can teach us how to work with the people of Yokohama." The green-haired teen tried to keep a poker face.

"Oh, I don't know. It might be a little too late for that. You've already run around poking into people's businesses so bluntly. They certainly all know you are looking for something—" Dazai paused dramatically, seemingly enjoying the hint of apprehension and despair that crawled over all the students' faces. "Relax, kids. It's not an endgame yet. While your chance of getting clues out of the locals is shot, there is another way: Connections."

He gestured towards the door, motioning for them all to follow him. Although still suspicious, Midoriya and the rest of them complied. They stepped out of the agency and found themselves filing behind Dazai like a series of ducklings down the road. They didn't go far, just a few streets down to a warehouse section of the city.

Being a port city, Yokohama had a lot of these industrial and storage places for all kinds of logistics and inventory purposes. This one, however, looked like it had been abandoned for a while. There were patches of random grass growing between cracks in the pavement and stains marked the outer concrete walls. While most things appeared intact, the thick layers of rust and dust all over the pipes and windows told of the building's old age.

A few dents covered the metal loading dock and the signs no longer buzzed with light. Scattered junk and pieces of rubble or broken bricks were left all over the parking space too.

The heavy metal doors were rolled up but Midoriya still couldn't help but cough as soon as they set foot indoors. Time had a scent to it. Thick and damp, the irritating smell ingrained itself into every mote swirling under the sunlight. Shoji opened another window and a gust of fresh air entered, which did little to bring in more light into the gigantic space or clear the awful smell of mold and stale air.

“This place smells like wet logs buried under gym socks.” Kaminari coughed loudly.

As far as they could see, nothing had rotted in here and there wasn’t any leakage. However, there were scribbles of paint from vandalism and cigarette butts littered randomly. It had probably been used by local delinquents as a place to hang out.

“You should get used to it.”

A man’s voice came from deeper into the shadows. Footsteps sounded but it didn’t come from straight ahead. Instead, it felt like it was from above them.

Looking up, Midoriya saw the orange-haired Mafia.

Nakahara Chuuya was standing on the ceiling. Although upside down, his jacket and hat remained on him in a perfect fit. His hair swayed slightly as he flipped over, landing in front of Dazai and the rest of them.

“You damn merkel really need to know how to keep the outsiders in line,” he cursed loudly at the detective. “They just had to go catch Q’s attention. The brat was already psychotic, Huang just made it worse.”

When he finished snapping at Dazai, he didn’t wait for a response before turning towards the hero students.

“Look, I don’t know what the dragon pearl looks like either–” he glared at the group, silencing them without missing a beat as he held up a white envelope– “But I know someone who does. Nothing in this life comes for free though so if you want to save your friend, you clean this place up and I’ll give you the clue for the pearl.”

“And this, children, is how connections work!” Dazai beamed. “I know somebody who knows somebody but to get what you want, you must still pay a price.”

“Are you messing with us?” Todoroki asked with a frown. “He’s Port Mafia.”

“Wait, if ADA can’t get Bakugou back alone, why isn’t Port Mafia helping then?” Uraraka suddenly perked up. “Port Mafia is supposed to protect us, right?”

That was the deal Principal Nedzu told them. He reached an agreement with Port Mafia that Midoriya and the rest of them completely forgot about. They had been so focused on getting Bakugou back. Also, it wasn’t anybody’s normal reaction to consider that villains could help them save people.

The rest of his classmates also started thinking.

“Right, if balance is so important, then Huang Zeku wouldn’t want to face two organizations at the same time.” Sero placed a hand on his chin as if in thought. “We can pressure him to give Bakugou back without a fight.”

The rest of them murmured a small agreement but before the buzzing of whispers could turn more excited, Nakahara sneered.

“This isn’t a numbers game.” Nakahara adjusted his hat roughly, sounding annoyed at the same time. “Our deal was that Port Mafia would guarantee you safe passage and survival—with ADA’s assistance—while you’re in our city. But that’s under the condition that you stick to our rules. You broke the rules first. Rules that people repeatedly told you to adhere to. Now you want us to clean up your mess with our reputation? Life ain’t easy, you bastards.”

Small pebbles at his feet shook, vibrating dangerously as if they would shoot through the air to pierce their chests the next second.

“We’re Port Mafia, there are some rules you don’t just break for funsy. Violence can accomplish goals in an instant but none of that keeps loyalty. Look, I don’t even think Huang plans on keeping your friend for long. Eventually, he will return the kid so as long as we can send Bakugou alive out of Yokohama at the set end time for this field trip, Port Mafia has kept our end of the bargain. It doesn’t matter what state of being he is in.”

“A-are you saying that even if we just sit by, Huang will be giving Bakugou back in a few days?” Kirishima asked with disbelief and distrust.

“Yeah.”

“...But no one knows what he’s doing to Bakugou during these few days?”

“Correct.”

“That doesn’t help at all?” exclaimed Kirishima while visibly upset. “What if Bakugou is getting tortured right now?”

That giant dragon they saw the other day certainly looked like it wouldn’t mind taking a few bites off the blond teen.

“As long as he still has a breath in him, the doctor at ADA can fix him up.” Nakahara tucked the white envelope back into his jacket. “You can tell your teachers you want to go home and leave. When Huang releases Bakugou, ADA will send him back.”

“Can you stop talking about Bakugou like he’s a commodity?” Mina shouted and the girls next to her had to stop her from lounging at the mafia. “You’re telling us to abandon our friend. He’s not a doll with replaceable parts that you can ship back to the manufacturer after breaking him!”

“Oh, so you do know that,” Nakahara muttered quietly as he pressed the edge of his hat lower.

“What?”

“Alright, we’re wasting time here.” Dazai waved his hand, catching everyone’s attention. “See, Chuuya is here as a personal courtesy to me. He got the information on the dragon pearl through his connection. You’re using our resources, favors that we pay back to others personally. It’s like birthday gifts or a loan; if you never pay the other person back, they won’t want to deal with you in the future, no matter what kind of trouble you are in. These

things might be unspoken but there is always a string attached. We're not your family or friends, the person who wants this warehouse cleaned is going against Huang by giving you clues. You can't expect all this to be free because it might be the goodwill of someone else or because it's the right thing to do."

He twirled around, waltzing towards the shadows.

"You can either clean this place or go back to the agency and try it your way or simply return to UA."

There it was again. Midoriya's fists tightened by his side.

There was never a choice.

Yokohama had decided the only path for them from the beginning. No matter how hard they struggled, they only ever had one choice from the beginning.

So they cleaned. There was a small truck that had a bunch of cleaning supplies and instructions on how to clean this place. None of it was extraordinarily dangerous work since this warehouse was more of a storage for grain and the likes. Most of it was basic janitorial work and some heavy lifting to bring the broken equipment—like a cabinet or shelf—out onto a garbage truck. It was hard and grueling on their bodies since no quirks were allowed still.

"I can't believe people do this for a living," someone in Class B whispered through labored breath. "It didn't look this hard on the outside."

UA had robots and Midoriya remembered his junior highschool's janitors. They had staff with multiple hands or those who could control brooms telepathically. People had quirks that suited their jobs, making things easier and much more efficient.

"If only we can use our quirks. I can make things less heavy."

"Go into tight spaces without bending like this."

"Make acid for easier cleaning."

"Stick up the dirt and not be scraping with rags."

Midoriya was reminded of his days cleaning up the beach. Also, instead of running around the city without knowing where or what they were looking for, the heavy lifting and cleaning had an end in sight. Although exhausting, he didn't feel like there was a storm of chaos or panic in his skull.

"Iida, are you alright?" he asked as he passed by the taller teen. Iida was wiping down a window but he had a strange look on his face.

"Yeah... I was just thinking," said Iida. "We are the ones cleaning this place right now. If we weren't here, a group of locals would be doing this right? Yokohama locals who are

quirkless. They don't have physical training like we do or even stronger bodies like Shoji's. No advanced robots to help with cleaning like UA does...just people, regular people. Class B mentioned that the Yokohama people had to rebuild their city from a trashland. It must have been extra hard for them."

Midoriya hadn't thought of it like that. Now that Iida mentioned it though, he could see much of a challenge that was. To constantly have to rebuild from ruins in the midst of gang wars, not knowing if violence was going to destroy their hard work again tomorrow...but that made it even more puzzling. Why would the Yokohama citizens continue to reject aid from the heroes if this was what they had to put up with on a daily basis?

They went back to cleaning. Midoriya volunteered to start on the attic and he was dealing with cobwebs when he noticed Dazai at the door. The man's figure was a blurry reflection on the dusty mirror, patches of dark and brown colors that made it hard to figure out what his expression looked like.

When Midoriya turned around, Dazai had his usual smile on.

"Is there a problem?" Midoriya didn't trust Dazai, not one bit. The man was ex-mafia and he admitted to being one of the people who hurt Kyuusaku. If it wasn't for him and all the other villains, maybe the kid wouldn't have turned out this way.

"No, not really. I'm just curious about one thing."

"What is it?"

"You've been one of the more emotional ones since Bakugou was taken. Your classmates told me you grew up together." Dazai approached him. There was no shine in the man's eyes, almost as if Midoriya was staring into two dead ponds. "Are you trying to save Bakugou because you want to or because that is the right thing to do?"

"Excuse me?"

Midoriya didn't understand what the man was trying to do.

"You must have been quite close if you know each other all your lives." The way the man talked wasn't just irritating any longer, it felt intentionally placating on a dramatic level. "Childhood friends and all. But he doesn't like you much, doesn't he? You tried to be nice and explained away a lot of his personality traits but deep down, you know he's not a friend. Not a true one."

His words seemed to have a magical allure to it. The soft pitch hooked Midoriya's memories to the surface.

Pain was something the green-haired teen knew well. He had experienced it with every inch of his body, felt each punch and scorn that marked him deep in his bones.

The day he was officially announced as quirkless, it had been devastating. It felt like the sky was crushing down and everything that he had ever hoped for, all his dreams and aspirations,

turned to nothing but ashes. It wasn't his mother's fault but people told them that Midoriya Izuku was defective. He was missing something that every other kid had. Izuku was a freak in this superhero society. For that, he shall suffer the pain of being different and wrong.

And Kacchan had been a part of that pain. They grew up together, almost like brothers but everything changed after the diagnosis and Izuku felt like he was no longer human, at least not in those red eyes filled with malice.

Useless, worthless little Deku who was out of his mind to think he would ever amount to anything of any significance. The teasing and mocking followed him everywhere he went. The kids gave him other cruel nicknames and then the shoving came. They pushed him and hit him, sometimes punched him too.

Bakugou joined them.

The weight of Bakugou's backhanded slap and the smell of explosive residues stunned him completely alongside with the shellshock of betrayal.

The world only turned more viscous towards him from there. His peers and teachers saw no wrong in publicly humiliating him, reminding him at every turn that without a quirk, he was just a waste of space. The seeds of self doubt and anger planted themselves into his heart, festering and growing inside of him.

"He is quite the spitfire. Must have made your life hell, I bet."

The anguish of being ignored and put down time and time again. The nights that he would cry himself to sleep because he felt like a burden to his parents. He remembered the purple and blue on his skin, the sickly yellow that followed when the kids at the playground shoved him down slides. Every scraped knee and hurtful word he received left a scar on his heart too.

"The adults must have loved him. Kid's got everything from looks to smarts and a strong flashy quirk that you outsiders adored."

He watched as Bakugou paraded his quirk around like there was an invisible crown on his head. They praised him constantly, giving him all their attention and care because he had the strongest quirk for the brightest future.

Bakugou Katsuki had everything. The perfect combination of everything anybody could ever want in the lottery of life. Jealousy actually wasn't the first thing Midoriya felt for the blond. Midoriya remembered thinking that Kacchan was so cool, like All Might. He was a role model for Midoriya, someone he wanted to get closer to and be like. He wanted the connections and looks of adoration, the things that would stuff his heart warm and fuzzy like after he helped an old granny pick up her dropped groceries.

But he would never be able to compare to Bakugou, not when he was stupid and useless Deku.

Midoriya still remembered the smell of burnt paper and plastic everytime Bakugou destroyed his notes. Each push and shove from those heated hands that were supposed to bring warmth and all the dirty words thrown his way. The screaming and yelling, the sounds of explosions

sparking off that made his spine shivered and his body flinching away...he didn't understand where he had gone wrong.

He wanted friendship, he tried to be helpful. Why wasn't he ever enough? Why was he the one who had to constantly prove himself to be worth something? It was hard to not feel the negative emotions over time, resentment came first of course. It was hard to not hate the blond boy with all of his heart. He hated how Bakugou thought so little of him because he was quirkless. He hated that superiority complex and those angry explosions. He hated how Bakugou could have everything he ever wanted just by existing.

He wanted to sock Bakugou in the jaw and scream at him. He wished to stop bottling everything down and stop being the bigger person just so Bakugou could get away with things he shouldn't be getting away with.

"I care about him. He's my friend and classmate and even if he's not, I will still care about him because he's in danger." The words came out of his mouth and he saw Dazai's smile deepened.

"Even now, he's not here but he's all everybody could talk about and think about. If it had been you who was taken, would he be advocating so strongly to save you because he cares or because he likes winning against the impossible?"

The latter.

Because he was Kacchan and Kacchan always wins. Because he hated villains and he was going to be the greatest hero there was.

"Nobody ever questions why he wants to be a hero, do they?"

No. Only Midoriya. Forced to prove himself again and again, to people he grew up with, to strangers who all had an opinion about him the instant they learned he was quirkless, to his teachers and the world...he was just so sick of it all.

Bakugou was not a hero. No real hero would tell other people to kill themselves or kick people down because they were weaker in physical strength. He didn't even get a "thank you" for saving Bakugou from the Sludge villain. The heroes only focused on praising Bakugou for his courage and quirk. They pushed Izuku to the side after a scolding and no one ever bothered to ask if he was alright. Him. He had been attacked by the Sludge villain once already and he jumped in to save Bakugou. No one cared about his well being.

Except All Might. The No.1 hero asked if he needed a check up at a hospital after telling him he had been wrong and Izuku could be a hero. His successor. All Might picked him! He had been too excited to care for hospitals then. Things were getting better. He had been so focused on not disappointing All Might and training to be a hero (that someone, for the first time in his life, believed he could be) that he completely forgot about Bakugou. Getting into UA had been a dream come true and he was gaining friends, building confidence.

But it didn't get easier. He was in the same class as Bakugou and it was hard seeing the blond boy's face everyday. That voice inside his head kept reminding him how if he slacked off or

if he slipped up once, he would be back to where he started.

A hand was on his shoulder and the strange cold feeling returned. Dazai's touch froze the flames of power inside Midoriya, making it harder to breathe.

"You have a big heart, Midoriya-kun. I don't think I would have been as nice as you are towards someone who couldn't spare an ounce of kindness in return. Very few people tried to get your side of the story, right? But you'd still try so hard to save him."

Stop causing a scene and making things all about you.

Stop starting fights with Bakugou.

If you didn't do something to provoke him, he would leave you alone.

The voices of the past were returning. He could be doing his own thing, writing in his notes and analyzing under his breath and Bakugou would attack him or insult him out of the blue.

And during those moments, it became even more difficult for him to keep that smile on his face and pretend everything was alright, that he didn't find Bakugou's laughter with Kirishima and the rest of their little group repulsive.

Midoriya despised the way that Bakugou simply did not care. He never told him sorry or showed any signs of acknowledging that he was wrong at one point. Midoriya would have forgiven him if he simply spat out a sorry too or maybe even if he had just finally admitted that Midoriya could be, and was, on his way to become a hero just like Bakugou was.

People said that was just how Bakugou was, that he was too prideful to do apologies and the rage burned inside of Midoriya. Decades of painful bullying wasn't just someone else's personality trait. Bakugou actively made him suffer and no one else knew about it, or rather, they didn't care enough to do anything about it.

He knew he was supposed to be better. He knew he wouldn't find concern or compassion in others when he asked for help. They would look at him with disappointment and a sigh that was the equivalent of quirkless Deku was at it again.

They took one look at him and determined him and gave up on him. No one listened. No one understood. He wasn't worth their time. They yelled at him, hit him, told him he was a liar or that he wasn't trying hard enough. He was told constantly that he had to work extra hard to earn things that others took for granted.

Why? Was he not human too? Was he not worthy of any respect or kindness because he didn't have a quirk?

Of course things changed after entering UA. A part of Midoriya couldn't help but feel that he was standing on a stolen platform, that deep down, he knew none of this was truly his if not for One For All. The gift from his idol was what was important. Not Midoriya himself.

But he was sick and tired of always being the one at fault. He was exhausted from having to be the one to put in the effort and make the first gestures of kindness while getting nothing

but hatred in return. He saw Bakugou on his high pedestal and it was a constant reminder of how he was never going to be seen as an equal.

“You’re doing something to me,” he whispered. A scarred hand wrapped around the man’s larger one, trying to pry those bandaged fingers off his shoulder. He met Dazai’s eyes, now that they were so close, Midoriya could see a flicker of glimmer in this man’s eyes. Dazai’s hands felt odd. Even if they were covered in bandages, Midoriya still felt the roughness of a hand that held a gun for too long. “Why do I need a reason to save someone? He’s in danger and I can help, that’s all.”

His answer made Dazai released him and backed away like a cat that was met with a spray of water. However, the detective shrugged and placed his hands behind his head. With a nonchalantly cheerful attitude, he laughed.

“I really hate people like you,” said Dazai and he tilted his head to the side just as a rock flew past him. It scraped past the edge of Midoriya’s hair and stopped right before crashing into the wall.

Nakahara stood in the hallway, glaring at the both of them.

“Oi, Dazai,” Nakahara spat, “Stop bothering the kid. The longer they are here, the shorter my free time is.” He cocked his head, nodding at Midoriya. “Get back to work.”

Midoriya could hear Mineta calling for him from downstairs. He went back to doing what needed to be done while trying to push the feelings and intrusive thoughts out of his head. It wasn’t time for something as silly as this. There was real danger around the corner and they were in a hostile city with no heroes coming to their aid.

Of course Midoriya had to step up and do what was right.

Forty teenagers running on a fuel of fear and pride turned out to be a great cleaning crew.

Chuuya gave the hero kids the envelope after the warehouse was cleaned. It was already late at night but he doubted the kids could wait until morning to open it. Not that it was his problem though. His time in this part of the script was over.

“Cleaning duty, really?” Chuuya cracked open the canned coffee as he stood under the streetlamp not far from ADA’s office. “That’s the best we can come up with?”

“It’s hard to compress so many lessons into such a short span of time.” Dazai pressed a button on the vending machine, taking out a can of crab-flavored soda. “I had other ideas but unfortunately they got rejected for being too cruel.”

“No doubt. But really, cleaning duty?”

It was a fake crime with fake evidence so of course they had to fake the clues too. That much Chuuya could understand. Still, he expected something more from his old partner.

“It keeps all of them in one place that’s easy to supervise and away from the public. Besides, Port Mafia gets a clean storage space. Ozaki must be happy.”

Speaking of his colleague, Chuuya remembered the woman had a shipment of wheat coming in. Port Mafia had a hand in pretty much every business that went through Yokohama. However, it wasn’t the normal amount that they would process normally. “Are we really preparing for war in case the outside cuts us off?”

“Hard to say...but if things become unstable out there, we’re better off prepared. Anyhow, that’s not something your little slug brain needs to be concerned with. If there does come a desperate time, Mori will tell you who to kill.”

Chuuya clacked his tongue. “I hate it when you never explain anything properly.”

“It’s exhausting. You’ve felt it first hand today with the hero kids. All the schemes and logic needed to be grinded down so finely before they could absorb anything.”

“They don’t know our world.” Chuuya took a large swig of his coffee, letting his taste buds be fully submerged under the bitter taste. “It’s been a while since you tried to rattle someone who’s not an enemy. What did the Midoriya kid do?”

“Nothing besides being blind to privilege, that’s all.” Dazai leaned against the stone fence, quietly watching Chuuya throw his empty can into the trash instead of provoking the mafia like he usually would. “These heroes and their second chances. They should be glad that I’m not mafia any more.”

He didn’t need to say any more.

Chuuya stared up at the night sky in silence. He had been an orphan, taken in by other children who were in the same situation as him. When times were bad, people’s lives were worth about the same as grass growing on the side of a road. The kids banded together in order to survive when the adults were too busy killing each other.

They had one shot.

There were no do-overs or second chances that came without blood. Friends who lost fingers for getting caught stealing, the ones who couldn’t last another winter day because they couldn’t secure medicine...even if he did everything right, one decision could lead to many betrayals and the game was over.

Losing meant death and that golden law followed even after he joined Port Mafia.

Chuuya didn’t know the full extent of what Dazai had to give for a second chance at a relatively normal life under the sun. The past mafia executive had to abdicate plenty of things, from past connections and wealth and everything else just to gamble for the possibility of a different life. It was the same for everyone else in Yokohama. Ozaki thought she could spend the rest of her life bathed in love and peace but one wrong choice shattered her dream. For others, the wrong decisions led to losing a hand or being stuck in a living hell. One wrong choice was all it took to end up with a slit throat.

Even Huang Zeku, while Chuuya didn't like the Dragon much either, he knew Huang had it tough too. Building a company in the worst part of Yokohama wasn't a video game with infinite chances or came with a step-by-step easy guide.

They all had one shot at life.

They were the survivors while plenty more didn't make it.

"Call it jealousy or some other ugly words but to see these hero-hopefuls grab a second and third or fourth chance for granted...who wouldn't be mad?" Dazai was finished with his drink too. Chuuya would never know how the man actually managed to drink that disgusting thing with a straight face. But then again, it was Dazai.

Dazai will always be a weirdo and a pain in the ass.

"Also, I don't like how the heroes try to save everybody the same way. A helping hand shouldn't continue to grab at another because there is something to prove."

Chuuya didn't bother listening to the rest of Dazai's cryptic ramble. He didn't particularly hate the heroes or liked them. So long as they weren't interfering with Port Mafia's businesses or messing with Chuuya's sweet rides, he could care less about the whole theater of villains and heroes. The same could be said for the hero kids. He could care even less about teenage drama or relationship woes. Competition between peers or resentment and whatnots were none of his concern.

They weren't a part of his job.

"Don't one of us need to go check up on Bakugou?" he interjected after checking his watch. "It's almost back to Huang's part in the script. He better get his act together in time for the finale and we still don't have an actual dragon pearl."

"When have you seen Lizard Boy eager to do anything?"

Close to never.

Besides bloodshed that was. Huang was most alive when he was murdering people. His vitality was nurtured by blood and the sight of organs flying in the air, pieces dropping as if the sky had rain corpses for celebration. Excitement was reflected in those red eyes when bodies went boom like fireworks and sometimes, his gaze felt more like a food critic's judging the grade of steak.

Fucking creepy bastard.

Chuuya groaned. "I'm more worried that he might have forgotten that he has a hostage."

"I'm sure he has people looking after Bakugou."

"Like Q?"

The crinkle of a smile on Dazai's laidback face faltered for a second. "Bakugou will be fine...mostly, maybe. Physically at least."

That didn't inspire any confidence at all.

Now, Chuuya himself wasn't a great influence and he knew that Mori wasn't a good mentor or father figure in any sense. Still, whatever conscience that Chuuya had clobbered together over the years highly doubted that Q was in good hands with a mad scientist who possible was also a cannibal.

But it was what it was, unless Mori gave a different order, Chuuya couldn't kill Q for the hell of it.

"I'm going home," he yawned. He was sure Huang Zeku would come up with something at the last minute. As much as the dragon was an antisocial and introverted psychopath, he always pulled his weight when the city was on the line.

However, Chuuya only get about a meter away before Dazai yelled after him.

"What?" the orange-haired man barked.

"Just wanted to tell you good night," Dazai whistled with a soft smile. "And that your motorcycle got towed two hours ago. Someone placed a parking sign at the no-parking zone by mistake, oops!"

A hitch of breath got caught at the back of Chuuya's throat as he felt blood rushing through the veins at the side of his temple. The muscles in his neck tensed against his choker, stretching the fabric as his Adam's Apple bobbed. The familiar boiling rage from the days he worked side by side with Dazai returned with full force.

Cracking his knuckles, Chuuya screamed, "Dazai!"

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

I feel like every time I sat down to write, my brain is drawing blanks but I think I got the outline of this fic figured out.

1

“We’re not going to accomplish anything just sitting here.”

Aizawa was very well aware of that fact, knowing exactly what the principal would say if he was in this situation.

They were situated behind a water tank on a rooftop close to Huang Corp’s tower. It wasn’t the best vantage point but that was as tall as the towers surrounding Huang Corp would go. High up, he could see how everything about Suribachi was a mismatched patchwork of mazes even better. Aerial gardens and tiled slanted roofs, strings and lanterns or banners hung out balconies and windows. There were carved dragons at the edges of rooftops or other stone beasts guarding doors. On one side, he could see the familiar sight of clustered office towers, observing silently as the glass separated out cubicles of offices and the people working within. On Huang Corp’s end though, the windows were tinted or covered by curtains.

“I don’t think that’s up to us at this point,” muttered Aizawa.

Vlad made a gurgling noise at the back of his throat, sounding frustrated. The tension oozed off his shoulders too, pouring off as concrete as a waterfall of shadows. If Aizawa didn’t know better, he would have thought the other pro hero had activated his quirk, resulting in a cape of blood draping down his back.

But they were professionals for a reason. Although angry and irritated, they wouldn’t fall for the enemy’s tricks so easily.

“Good day, gentlemen.”

The voice came from behind them, which wasn’t surprising. Villains always like a good ambush. Except, perhaps they couldn’t call this an ambush because the newcomer never had the intention of hiding their presence. When they turned around, one man stared back at them. He was older, with gray hair swept back neatly and a trimmed mustache. A monocle sat over his right eye and when he moved, the gold chain connected to it swayed slightly against the side of his temple. Long black coat and pristine dress shirt, he was dressed normally, if not a little too formal in this day and age.

Or not, as the citizens of Yokohama's streets all seemed to favor their suits and vintage attires.

He stood just behind the water tank, shielded in shadows as he glanced down at the gold pocket watch in hand. "Pardon my bluntness but I am slightly disappointed at how predictable you have decided to move. I'm sure the detectives have strongly suggested for you two to remain with your students. There is a strength in numbers and the children would have benefited greatly from your guidance."

The man had a polite demeanor; assertive and confident, mild-mannered even despite his words.

"You're...not with Huang Corp, aren't you?" Vlad asked. His fingers twitched by his side and Aizawa grew anxious too, wishing that they had their regular full set of gears instead of just a few gadgets that could pass the security checks at Yokohama's border. A true professional never complained about the environment or tools. They didn't become heroes just because they had cool toys either but Aizawa would admit that there was still a difference between his regular weapons and the ones that he had to make-do with.

"Correct, I am Hirotsu Ryuurou of Port Mafia." The older man smiled as he put his pocket watch away. His hand reached inside his coat and Aizawa stared at him intensely, anticipating an attack or a weapon. However, the mafia pulled out a cigar. "My boss has ordered me to ensure you don't engage directly with Huang Corp."

"Shouldn't Port Mafia be helping us get our student back?" Discreetly, Aizawa surveyed their surroundings, trying to locate any additional possible enemies. A trace of anything really, maybe an edge of a coat behind shadows or the blink of a gun situated at a different balcony. "For a powerful organization, you seem oddly uninterested in asserting your authority in your own city."

"A common misconception." A twist of the lit cigar caused a thin line of smoke to twirl in the air. There was still a pleasantness in his voice but his gaze was dark and devoid of warmth. A smile pulled the wrinkles on his face tight as he stared up at Huang Corp's tower. "The maintenance of authority is not a constant throttle of force. If we bring out a call to war for every minor inconvenience, that is simply no way to conduct business."

What he meant was that they haven't brought enough chips to the gamble. It wasn't uncommon for criminals to go back on their words or rip up treaties with other gangs. Port Mafia just wasn't going to turn on Huang Corp for a bunch of outsiders.

Aizawa had to take a deep breath and remind himself that they were at a disadvantage in Yokohama. As representatives of the hero society, the locals (criminals, actually) naturally wouldn't side with them. What would helping them gain? From Port Mafia's standpoint, they would lose their alliance with the other powers of Yokohama for they looked like a sell out or worse, weak in that they were bending to the heroes' will. Aizawa or UA in general couldn't promise enough profit that would replace the trust and whatever arrangement Port Mafia had with Huang Corp right away either.

“The owner of that tower has promised the detectives he will return your student in one piece. Patience is a virtue that pays well.”

“And we’re supposed to just take yours and his word on that?”

“Isn’t it precisely because you didn’t trust us that landed you in this precarious situation?” Hirotsu was calm. A soft glint reflected off his monocle while he threw a different question back. “Your students didn’t trust our rules so they acted rashly, which caused them to lose a friend. You didn’t trust the detectives, which is why you are here. But now, you found yourself stuck and unable to proceed.”

Because there was nothing they truly could do.

Aizawa hated to admit how the mafia was right. Both him and Vlad could see that the detectives were being elusive. Government soldiers or sanctioned detectives, the difference between them or in comparison to the mafia was slim and muddy at best from what the heroes could observe. Some had friendlier smiles and others spoke eloquently but none of that mattered if when pushed came to shove.

A part of him also moved because that was what experience had taught him. Heroes moved into action, calculated and careful for they always tried. Hope existed, even if it was a bare thread, and those who don’t reach out would never grab hold of it. Good detectives don’t believe all the promises anybody and everybody gave them. Taking information with a grain of salt was the guarantee. Some evidence couldn’t be trusted in full unless witnessed with their own eyes. Also, because...because there must be something. Perhaps what the police needed was more evidence, some sort of photo or other intel to show Bakugou was in trouble.

The police—Yokohama ones—would have to move then. Surely, with just cause, they could take Bakugou back legally.

Except, they underestimated the fear these criminals ruled with.

The book of justice was worth about as much as a brick in Yokohama in the eyes of those who held power. They all claimed to follow some sort of law but those words were written in their hearts, known only to their whims. Huang Corp secured Bakugou well and while Suribachi City wasn’t all that large, finding one teenager was still a needle in a haystack. Even tougher when there wasn’t anybody willing to spill the beans. There were plenty of employees moving in and out of the building and many citizens too.

Except that, Aizawa and Vlad couldn’t come up with a plausible plan.

Sure, they could threaten an employee to sneak them in. Bash a cleaner in the head and take their ID, infiltrate through the air vents or do some other shady work. But what difference would there be between the heroes and villains then? It wasn’t that the pro heroes were scared of taking action or being decisive either. From the outside, Huang Corp security was solid but not impenetrable. No base—whether heroic or villainous—would ever be. There was always a way in.

It was just that...they *couldn’t*.

Actions had consequences. Aizawa wasn't afraid of being caught or being tortured, that was a part of the job, a risk he knew since he debuted as a pro. However, he wasn't just here with a seasoned colleague. They had children to think of. Children, who were currently under the care of an organization whose loyalty that Aizawa had serious doubts for. He could tell that the detectives were good people, men and women that wouldn't think of murdering innocents let alone hurting minors to achieve a goal.

But no one ever said they had to be the ones hurting the students.

Just as this field trip was diplomatic in nature, what would happen if it was discovered that pro heroes—mutated Costumes (as some of the locals called them behind their backs)—attacked Yokohama locals? Even if they had good reason for it, the act of violence alone was justification enough. Proof that Port Mafia was right. The outsiders looked down and hurt people like them. It would prove what the oldsters thought and taught their young; Heroes in name were actually terrorists.

What was to stop ADA from turning the students over to the military or Yokohama government then? What sort of trade would HPSC and UA need to make in order to get the hostages back? The ransom for forty something people was much heavier than for one.

They haven't even gotten to the effects of public outlash from the rest of society yet.

So Aizawa and Vlad, although they thought they might have a 30% chance of locating and retrieving Bakugou, they hesitated.

Vlad took a step towards Hirotsu but not so close they were within a hand's reach. "Why do all of this? Going through all this just to mess with us?"

"You look at us with such sad and angry eyes," murmured the old man. He looked away, lighting the smoke in his hand and taking a puff. "Pitiful and unhealthy, missing the chances of childhoods or experiences that we never got. The wrong choices and the wrong passions... as if somehow it is unseemingly to survive. I have traveled into your world and someone once told me; *When you start distinguishing our gang against their gang is when law becomes meaningless.*"

He let out a rancid laugh, almost with a bitter joy that was out of place.

"Laws have always been meaningless, gentlemen. And it is not about us vs them, it is the survival of one and the survival of a whole. We have youngsters who would die to protect their homes and men who grabbed hold of power in the dark. There are those who raise a sword under a flag as well as those who lived to build civilization upon rubbles. Every part is ever changing and every bit can be discarded. They do not love as you do or hate as you would. Our loyalties might be split, nonetheless, Yokohama has fought and it will fight and it will survive, be it a part of us and a portion of them remain in the end."

More smoke escaped his mouth, small clouds of gray scattered with the wind as a gleam of something unnameable twinkled behind his eyes.

“Don’t be alarmed. I am merely an observant until one of you decides to jump into action. I don’t think I have much to worry about though.”

He smiled, gentle and understanding but also as if it was a challenge. A flicker of orange sparked at the end of his smoke.

“You heroes aren’t the type to abandon the majority for the preservation of one.”

2

Yokohama was screaming.

This city had a constant of noises. A never ending stream of chorus composed from the painful wailing of the unfortunate. Katsuki doesn't remember when the voices first started. It seemed to have always been there, so long and everlasting that it might as well have outlived air.

It was the worst.

But also the one silver lining in this shitty life.

He was about nine or ten on that cloudy afternoon. Musutafu wasn’t that far from Yokohama and his parents were usually busy with work. That was life just as his mom had taught him: Success was earned and with it, came responsibilities and long hours. So Katsuki packed his bag and threw on an old hoodie, took a few rolls in the mud before he headed for Yokohama.

Getting into Yokohama undetected was easy for him. He knew all the secret tunnels or passages into the city, some were new and others were abandoned long ago by organizations or people who have already died. Yokohama was a divided place, not just because the neighborhoods were split by different powers but also because of the drastic divide between the rich and the poor.

Katsuki watched and listened.

Yokohama told its story to its only audience. There was a tragedy behind every brick but also a tale under every rock. Katsuki listened to the rant of mothers chiding children and fathers drowning their sorrows. Lovers joined hands in marriage and students flipped through textbooks. The prostitute’s heels clicked against the pavement while delivery drivers got chased by rabid dogs. A secret flashed before his eyes, the red of a bathroom floor looked back at him in his reflection. More and more people danced over his vision. Some whispered love and others wept. If he reached out, the slaves being sold at the black market seemed to be grabbing onto him. Gunshots sounded as Katsuki’s shoes slammed against the empty road, his feet carrying him past the stories Yokohama wanted him to see.

The dying begged, the suffering prayed.

Except, there was no god to hear.

Only Katsuki.

So he found a corpse. Cocooned in a long and tattered coat, the body laid in a corner of a dark alley. Broken. Dismembered. In every shape and form or state that was physically possible (and sometimes, impossible). They grew in this city as garden weed would during the spring and summer, popping inches out of the ground within hours. There were about a dozen or so of these each week when Katsuki still bothered to count, growing in numbers so fast that the police stopped caring unless there was something more. No one else cared either. The gentle but mundane barely keep themselves alive while the ones with power couldn't hear the small inhale of breath traveling into the corpse's lungs.

But Yokohama heard it and Katsuki did too.

"You're going to be okay," he said.

Katsuki brought the body to one of the makeshift shelters he found. It used to be an air raid shelter but had long been forgotten. He turned it into a crappy safe house that he could spend a few nights at if he couldn't find a chance to get out of Yokohama. The good houses were already occupied by the different gangs and even if he went to find a hiding place in the slums, there were also people there that would chase him out.

There were so many secrets within Yokohama but all laid bare as an open book if he closed his eyes. The ports sang to him and the church bells whispered memories in his ears. People's lives spun to life in front of his eyes as ferociously as the waves crashing against the shore. One slip of inattention in a dream and he would slip under the currents that washed the blood from Yokohama's shores.

Katsuki didn't like Yokohama.

He didn't like the noise or the people. He hated every gunshot and every time a knife stuck into innocent people's flesh or how insidious men brought baseball bats to a family's knee caps. But the city didn't let him go, dragging him back no matter how far away he physically was.

Hear us.

Katsuki was never one who took a beating lying down or gave up before at least throwing one punch back. And like his father's old jokes; luck was always on Katsuki's side.

See us.

The almost corpse said his name was Huang Zeku. He was from another world. A futuristic one where the surface of the Earth had become unlivable and human civilization moved underground. Technology gave him something similar to an ability or quirk because fighting tournaments to the death was the biggest form of entertainment there. An arm or a leg, until death robbed their final breath, people would modify their bodies all for a chance to kiss the thrills of near death.

Zeku's father was the champion of the tournaments and a great developer of Cores. Yet, no victory was forever. Sometimes, people brushed much too close and death took pieces of

them as souvenirs. A different sort of madness ruled their society when blood wasn't enough to quench darkness's thirst. It infected everybody for only the strongest could survive.

Even if they were once kin.

Fallen into Katsuki's world, Zeku valued a solemn silence like it was gold but he spent an unhealthy amount of time staring up at the sky or at the ocean. Katsuki took him out of Yokohama for a short period because Yokohama was too dangerous for outsiders. While Zeku wasn't freaked out by the variety of weirdness due to quirks (body modification could do the same according to him), he had issues adjusting to the societal norms of what constituted heroes and villains.

Killing wasn't allowed here. Not even in battle or in sports. Heroes should also refrain from using excessive force and normal people weren't allowed to use their powers in public. Even if they were attacked, there was also a certain degree of force that they could use otherwise it could be argued as overstepping a line.

But Zeku's power was designed to kill.

Zeku wanted to go back to his world. He didn't fit in here. There was nothing familiar about this place. No family, no friends, no goals...he couldn't find his place anywhere. Yokohama was a slightly better fit for Zeku but his nerves were still on edge. It wouldn't be the first time Katsuki had to stop him from doing something stupid (like killing the wrong jackass).

Speak for us.

"Hey, are you even listening to me?" the blond hissed at Zeku after a near run in with one of the armed gangs in Yokohama. They probably looked ridiculous. Both too young with too thin limbs that the adults could snap easily, even without quirks or abilities. Zeku's hair fell just over his neck, tied at the back in a small tail. His appearance was far from menacing, something that was more of a curse in Yokohama.

Prettier things always fetched better prices. They can also be the best disguise and most dramatic tool for a show. Coiled Dragon was a good fit with Yokohama. With the right lies, it could pass as an ability or more. Katsuki stared at the soft flesh on Zeku's face, thinking of a possibility beneath that thin layer of plump skin. Potential pulsed to the beat of Yokohama's traffic and the memories of ginger-haired children hung by Port Mafia replayed. That tragedy wasn't too long ago but not too recent. It could work.

A story different from what Yokohama told Katsuki.

Hear us.

Be quiet.

"Huang Zeku! I'm fucking talking to you."

"Shut up."

See us.

No more.

“The hell—I just saved your sorry ass out there!”

“I didn’t ask for your help.”

Katsuki jabbed a finger into the other boy’s chest as he stood in front of him, preventing Zeku from getting out. “You would have been dead ten times over if it weren’t for me. You can’t even give me a simple thank you?”

Red eyes glared into the similar shade of crimson.

“And I said,” Zeku growled and he slammed a fist into the wall next to Katsuki’s head. His hand transformed as it touched the concrete, fingers turned into sharp white claws and cracked the wall. “I don’t need your help. Get lost.”

Speak for us.

No. Katsuki was going to write a different tale.

Biting his bottom lip, Katsuki glowered at the back of the older boy’s head as Zeku walked away.

“Don’t move!” Katsuki ordered.

Zeku froze in place. Katsuki quickly stepped in front of him again and slapped his hands around the sides of Zeku’s face, sandwiching it between his palms.

“You’re an insufferable piece of shit who thinks you’ve got everything figured out and can do it all on your own. You don’t understand jack about Yokohama.” Katsuki had to go on his tip toes but he didn’t care. He pinched and stretched Zeku’s cheeks roughly, making the ugliest expressions he could manage while the other boy couldn’t move. “You think I like having to haul your ass out of trouble? If you get captured they are going to experiment on you for sure because of that stupid core inside your chest. Then they will figure out your secret and find a way to weaponize it. That’s going to screw me over real bad. This place is a mess already and I don’t need motherfucking dragon armies to be wreaking havoc all around the city!”

Yokohama had enough trouble as it was. Rains of bullets, explosions, drugs of all sorts and maniacs of all kinds. Katsuki didn’t need a herd of dragons to be added to the mix. He had seen how much destruction one dragon could cause.

“I’ll find you a way back to that shitty dump of yours.” Releasing Zeku, Katsuki crossed his arms in front of his chest and hissed. “So shut up and listen to me before you fucking get yourself killed or end up on a damn dissection table.”

To be honest, the simplest solution here would be to kill Huang Zeku and burn his body. But Katsuki wasn’t a monster. He wasn’t a *villain*. How could he say he wanted to be a hero if he was killing people just because they might possibly inconvenience him or cause a problem in the future? If possible, he would like to keep the homicide of innocents off his list of life achievements.

Zeku didn't take being frozen in place well. When he could move again, it took a bit more convincing and physical brawl before Katsuki was able to explain more.

He stuck his tongue out and pointed to the silver mark that appeared on his tongue. It was an intricate pattern, kind of like the emblem one would find on the cover of a fancy old leather book. "There's a book that can make anything you write in it come true, with a few conditions. And everybody wants to get that book. The thing is, it doesn't want its powers to be abused and it transferred its power into me. A moving target that could fight back is better than a stationary one."

Katsuki closed his mouth. The things he said would come true when he meant it. Of course, he still had to follow a few of the same rules as The Book. He can't just spew nonsense like "the pig suddenly grew wings and flew out the stratosphere". The things he said had to be logical. The only difference was that since there was no page limit, he could essentially keep changing reality however he pleased.

"I don't know why it chose me or how but it's been fucking with my head ever since it did. The Book itself is sealed somewhere in this shitty city so it's connected to Yokohama. Thus, by association, I am connected to Yokohama too. I hear the city, I know every single crappy thing that happens around here. I am Yokohama." Katsuki shook his head while rubbing the side of his throbbing neck. "Before you ask, I tried. The first time you said you want to go back to your world I tried saying that you went back but nothing happened. It's not logical enough. Like you landing here is logical..." His grumbles faded off. He tried everything. Poofing Zeku back, fell into the sewer and magically went back, woke up and he was back... nothing worked. He can't just make up a story about how a mad scientist created a dimension traveling machine either. If that technology got out then a bunch of worlds were going to hell with a ribbon on the basket.

"So I'm stuck here," Zeku concluded angrily. Some of that anger was probably because what Katsuki could do was basically constant surveillance and not a lot of people would like that. At least Katsuki knew he wouldn't like having eyes on him all the time. But it wasn't like he watched over what everyone was doing every single second of the day. Most of the time he just ignored the flow of information like it was background music.

"Yep." Katsuki went on to explain how they could possibly send Zeku back. But it would be a long process of letting The Book do its magic and years of planning on their end. In the meantime, in order to repay Katsuki's help, Zeku would also need to do some things for him.

Katsuki was The Book. He needed someone in his corner that wouldn't want to use him for their own gains.

He needed a protector.

That was something he hated admitting. He wasn't like wimpy little Deku who needed to be babied all the time but he also knew he didn't stand a single chance against all those people who wanted The Book. He was mortal. He could get overwhelmed. He needed sleep and substances. Bakugou Katsuki wasn't bulletproof and he sure as hell can't be ready to fight 24/7 for 365 days of the year.

Katsuki doesn't run from his fears but he was scared. He saw what people, the adults and even children not much older than he was, were willing to do for survival, for greed. The images played in the background of his dreams every time he closed his eyes. He had seen what humans were willing to do to get their hands on The Book. He can't just wish away all the harm and ungodly sins. The Book simply doesn't work like that in the long run.

He can't wish away what made humans...well, human. Besides, forced Utopias never lasted.

That much Yokohama's various fanatics had already shown him.

Zeku didn't seem to like the idea very much. He sat down with his back against the wall.

"Why me?"

"You're an outsider. No associations to local organizations and no ties to anyone that could be used to threaten you. Also, we're kind of on the same boat." Katsuki flopped down beside him. He knocked on Zeku's chest with the back of his fist lightly. "There's only a few possible outcomes for you here. One, get out of Yokohama and be labeled as a villain. If you're lucky you'd end up as some big organization's watchdog and if you're not then it's labs and prison. Two, get captured and work for greedy assholes in Yokohama for the rest of your life. Three, die. Helping me is helping yourself."

"What do you get out of this?" asked Zeku. His red eyes were studying Katsuki, still suspicious, still on guard.

"...I want the voices to stop." The blond kept his gaze on the floor. He tried to keep his voice even but maybe there were a few cracks in there that he doesn't remember. "They keep screaming and crying and all that other stuff. I want it gone...or at least not be as loud."

"So I just have to kill them all?" If there were no more soldiers then the violence would stop.

"No!" Katsuki barked out in disbelief. Or maybe he shouldn't have been so surprised since Zeku's motto was strength was everything. "I don't want that! It's not a city if there's no people in it! And killing them all doesn't solve the problem, it would only create more villains."

And more villains meant more bloodshed. More screaming and pain.

Two gangs were having a shootout in the commercial street. A woman just murdered her husband and was dismembering the body in their apartment. Starving children trusted a man who promised food for labour only to be sold off to human traffickers...Katsuki felt his scalp go numb and his spine almost shivered when the noises bursted inside his head. The sounds were suffocating, all those pleas for help were a constant reminder of just how fragile people were.

Zeku didn't respond immediately. He looked like he was in deep thought before returning his attention to Katsuki.

"Can you really find me a way back?"

“Yeah.” That he was certain about. Even if he couldn’t, The Book would have knowledge about parallel universes so if he tapped into its powers deeper, he might be able to find a clue. It was going to fucking hurt but Katsuki doesn’t break a promise.

“We barely knew each other. What happens if I betray you?”

“The city will kill you before you even make it down the street.” Make an accident become reality. Every lamp was his eyes and every little nail or pebble or tool left alone was an extension of his hands. His words moved reality, bending it into any scene he wished.

No one would look twice at a dead kid’s body. This was why he never told anyone else about his secret before. Not his parents or his friends, not a single teacher or even Deku.

Because he knew if they tried to betray him he would have to kill them. Katsuki’s fists tightened at the thought of that. Even if they don’t, most people were too weak. One memory quirk or one chance encounter with the wrong ability users and Katsuki’s secret would be out. The less people that knew about The Book the better too. If the villains outside of Yokohama heard of it...there would be an apocalypse on earth.

Making people forget was easy but not a guarantee. Only the dead could keep a secret forever.

Hearing that, Zeku sighed and raked a hand through his hair while cursing in a low voice. Katsuki doesn’t really understand what he was saying but he could tell those weren’t good words.

When Zeku was finally done, he turned to face Katsuki, his intense stare never wavered.

“What do you need me to do first?”

And that was how they started.

While Katsuki could simply alter reality to suit his needs with The Book’s power, someone was bound to realize it. There were too many intelligent people in Yokohama and Katsuki knew that he wouldn’t be a match for any of them in the game of tactics and schemes. There was no script or story he could write that wouldn’t have a loophole these people wouldn’t notice. And sometimes, flawless was also alarming. Reality wasn’t a story. Not everything should make sense or follow logic.

The best lies were the ones that were partly true. Katsuki didn’t like lying. But he also didn’t want to end up as a fucking lab rat or rot in a cage. This was where Zeku came in. They weaved truth and lies together. Zeku did start a company. Katsuki also used his power to make sure it ran as smoothly as possible. A small command or twist in reality here and there wouldn’t alarm anyone and they could fly under the radar. Katsuki was Yokohama, he knew everything that went on in this city so he shared that knowledge with Zeku, then they used that information to plot and plan against the threats coming their way, to gain favors even.

Zeku wasn’t an all powerful celestial being. He was just a kid with the fruits of science transplanted inside his chest. But he was safe because he didn’t want the world.

He just wanted to go home.

That was different from the others in Katsuki's visions. To become god, to make a god, all of them wanted to write fantasies where normal people were lesser than a speck of ink on a page. Tragedies of hundreds were no more than the eraser shavings that were dusted off the page. And the heroes, he doubted too. Because the heroes weren't all good and some could be just like the Rats from Russia, waiting to doom the world with The Book's powers. Some heroes were good though, which was worst than them being evil. Because at least evil Katsuki wouldn't feel any remorse or guilt eliminating.

Maybe he should have given other people a chance to prove themselves to him instead of freezing them all out. He knew his classmates and teachers were good people at heart but that was precisely why he couldn't let them know. What would happen if trading Katsuki's secret could save a hostage? A little kid screaming for help? A pregnant woman begging for mercy for her unborn child? His former classmates and teachers were good people, they wouldn't want to give up on any chance to save someone.

Even if they wanted to stay loyal to him, what if it hadn't been one hostage? How would they choose when the stakes get higher, like a whole city?

The heroes would always make the right choices.

Katsuki couldn't risk that chance.

Spin the lies into his voice and weave truth into the words. He would build a legend that could combat calamity itself, dragging gods and fates out of the sky and into the mud where they belonged, even if the path forward was built on a tower of lies.

As the years passed, they succeeded and their mutual desire to not kick the bucket turned into something more.

Humming, Katsuki's fingers threaded through Zeku's hair, weaving the crimson strands into a braid. His hair was so much longer now, flowing down like a roll of silk in a shade that matched his earrings. Zeku told Katsuki that his mother used to wear red strings tied into intricate knots, a prayer for peace and blessings so Katsuki replicated them. It wasn't much but home was built piece by piece and everything had to have a start.

The blond teen had his back against Zeku's chest and their legs were tangled together over the new carpet. An arm was around Katsuki's waist from behind while light blue holograms surrounded the two. Zeku's free hand tapped and scrolled through reports and data. His eyes darted over the numbers and spinning diagrams sent up by one of Huang Corp's labs.

"I'm starting to think their brains are smoother than a worm's," muttered Zeku darkly. Time took the fat from his cheeks and sharpened his eyes, washing out any lingering hint of friendly features. His past and Yokohama did that to him. Fear was strength and an icy exterior was better for maintaining control. Not that Zeku was any warmer on the inside. Not usually, at least.

"Give them a break, not everybody is a prodigy like you." Katsuki released the tail of Zeku's braid, satisfied with the addition of small white flowers made of ribbons woven into his

boyfriend's hair. He found the box left in the living room by Kyuusaku, probably left overs from the younger kid's play time with Coiled Dragon.

Coiled Dragon was the most beautiful princess waiting to be rescued by the way. Just not very cooperative. It ate the cakes before the prince could defeat the villains (AKA Kyuusaku's wide collection of other creepy looking dolls). Not the cursing kind though, just regularly disturbing dolls that Katsuki was sure were modified from normal hero merch. Missing an eye, mouths sewn shut, added buttons and ripped up limbs.

Katsuki wasn't a therapist but this was a huge improvement of mental state if Katsuki ever saw one.

At least Kyuusaku stopped trying to make living dolls.

Zeku buried his face against the crook of Katsuki's neck, holding tighter onto the human warmth in the room.

The air smelled cold, metallic and artificial as expected since they weren't in the penthouse. One floor lower than their living quarters was Zeku's private lab, where a corner had been cleared to set up two large containers each about two feet tall. Around them, smaller cylindrical ones filled with bright colored liquids bubbled as pipes crossed over the walls behind them. Somewhere above, a light switched on, casting down a lime green halo over the machines. Slowly, the liquids were pumped into the containers and electricity sparked within. Clusters of synthetic flesh contracted and expanded, growing in size over metal frames stored inside the containers.

"Yep, that looks evil all right," whistled Katsuki. His hand found a remote on the side and he clicked a button, changing the lights to a sinister red. "Even better." He felt a kiss on the side of his neck, where soft lips pressed over his skin gently.

Raising a hand, Katsuki pushed his boyfriend's face away slightly, ignoring the small shudder up his spine when he felt the wet lick at the edge of his fingertip. The split end of a tongue swept down his finger and the pointed edge of teeth dug lightly into the area between his thumb and index finger. Sharper than normal, too long that it almost felt like fangs but never piercing his skin.

"Does it even matter?" Zeku sounded bored. "The final stage is somewhere else anyways."

"It sets the mood."

The Book loved its expositions. They had the materials and the environment and set up. Everything had to make sense before they could alter reality.

Turning around as much as he could, Katsuki looked Zeku straight in the eyes. The latter stared back, mouth shut and his expression normal as if the inhuman contact just seconds ago were a part of Katsuki's imagination. The blond leaned their foreheads together. "Are you sure this is what you want as the dragon pearl though?"

"Yes."

There was no hesitation behind his voice.

So silver burned over Katsuki's tongue. When the last word left his lips, the flesh inside the containers had changed, no longer shapeless as a clobber of blobs or deathly pale as bleached chicken. There was a new smell in the room too, sweet like a woman's perfume but also carrying a strange musk like overly ripe fruits.

Zeku released Katsuki, walking up to the containers and placing a hand over the glass. Beyond the glass, a hue of red matching the shade of his hair floated past. Bubbles rose over smooth skin, vanishing under before they even caught the red lab lights. Before Katsuki could see his creation up close though, preservatives were added into the containers and everything inside seemed to be covered in a white foam.

"It's perfect," said Zeku. "I have the memories of creating this for the past months."

UA and Port Mafia's spontaneous field trip didn't leave them a lot of time to plan but that was fine. The Book could give them all the time in the world.

Katsuki was up too, standing behind Zeku. Silent and gentle, he pressed his forehead on the older teen's back while wrapping his arms around the front in a hug. The knotted button of Zeku's cheongsam dug into his palms and he felt the slight tremble of the body he was hugging.

"Told you to choose something else," muttered Katsuki but it came out as more of a whine.

"I have something I need to do back there."

"I know."

"This is good."

"If by good you mean angry."

A quivering hand covered Katsuki's. Fingers threaded between his and their hands locked together.

"I am angry. At this stupid city and your extra stupid classmates...and at somebody that I really need to kill. But it's fine. I'll settle for rattling Port Mafia and every other cockroach in this city for now, including the heroes. Maybe they will finally understand how to back off when this circus show is done." Zeku turned their positions around. Face to face, his thumb pressed against Katsuki's chin, brushing over the edges of his mouth. There was a shadow over the older teen's features as his bangs fell over his eyes. "I'm fine. I can do my part of the script. I just don't want to forget."

"You're going to be okay," Katsuki said as he did years ago when they first met and he still meant every word. "You're going to be alright."

The silver disappeared between a kiss.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Forced Cannibalism

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

1

The clue the mafia gave them led to an address of a small traditional herbal store just outside of Suribachi City. It was sort of interesting to see how different factions shaped Yokohama's landscape. Oriental and cyberpunk infrastructure blended into a retro-cityscape, dispersed and scattered until the more modern main of Yokohama came into view.

Kirishima moved down the stone stairs two levels at a time, careful not to slip on the moss growing over the edge. Patches of various greens poked out from the cracks between the rocks, sprinkled along the gray while the air smelled damp. Aged rainwater dripped down the pipes, pooling around the drainage's edge under browning leaves.

They were at least five stories up from the ground, or maybe it was seven depending on where people started counting. The confusing infrastructure made it difficult to gauge where "ground level" should be. Crisscrossing stairs and randomly parallel edges of rooftops split the daylight, casting a disorienting array of shadow and light patches around every corner. Except, this place had none of Suribachi's lively spirits or noise of the city.

"This is such a weird place to open a shop at." Sero rubbed his elbows. The jacket he had on was baggier than usual, hiding the tape dispensers to make him resemble an average Yokohama teen more.

Krishima pulled his baseball hat down lower, even if it was just to make himself feel less seen. He thought he had changed. Other people's stares shouldn't have bothered him so much as it did before but Yokohama had its way of getting under people's nerves. Or maybe it was because of everything that happened lately that just had him on edge, where even the most normal touch of wind against his skin felt like ants gnawing over his bones.

This city was beyond creepy.

It was in everyone and everything they met. From the narrower buildings and absence of colorful heroes, everything reminded them that *they* were the outliers here. There was also something wrong with the people too. Muscles in suits and ordinary folks with their unspoken rules, even the detectives and police operated on some pessimistic and aloofly twisted logic.

Factions. Politics. Connections and histories.

People felt like pieces on a game board where everyone was trying to become a player rather than a pawn.

Kirishima couldn't believe he ever thought Huang Zeku was manly for being charitable. Nothing about the older teen had a lick of association with "generosity" or "kindness". Normalcy was just a pretense in this city.

The shop they were headed to, for example, was too hidden. Away from the busy streets and out of sight as if it couldn't care if there was enough foot traffic for generating sales.

"It has ties to the mafia so we have to be careful." Iida came up at the rear, filing behind the other teens as they moved down a narrow alley.

The rest of the hero students had elected the three of them to make this trip. It would be unwise to parade through the city in large crowds and the candidates had to be more inconspicuous. Thus, anybody who had a prominent physical mutation was out of the question. No differently colored skin, fur, extra limbs, or horns. Also, they couldn't cause another huge ruckus so those with distinctive or flashy quirks had to stay behind too. Midoriya then suggested that they needed a team consisting of mobility, agility, and defense.

Thus, here they were: Iida, Sero, and Kirishima.

It was Class A who caused Bakugou to be captured. Kirishima wouldn't want to put Class B in danger either.

They had to fix their own mistakes.

Although...Kirishima did find it a bit strange that Midoriya had suggested them instead of volunteering himself right off the bat. Usually Midoriya was the most eager to offer answers in all matters that involved Bakugou. Seeing that they grew up together, Kirishima hadn't thought too much of it despite the two's contrived dynamic.

But maybe his sleep-deprived and anxiety-filled brain was just overthinking. Midoriya was good with analytics and his reasoning for the team was sound. Without backup of other pro heroes, the three of them were best fitted for the job.

"I just wish it wasn't at such a-a..." Sero struggled to find the right description.

"A desolate place?"

Tanizaki's voice came from above. He was walking over a row of metal beams nailed into the exterior of a building. Kirishima supposed they were once used to mount signs but the shops had long closed down and took anything of value with it. The detectives still send a representative or two to shadow them, just to make sure no one else vanish while solving this mystery.

Jumping down, Tanizaki landed in front of him while efficiently avoiding the used needles on the ground. Questionable garbage littered these streets and a lot of windows were boarded up with sheets of wood.

“You guys have these places outside too, probably have it harder when quirks go haywire out there. It’s a universal problem in your world, I guess. So many heroes but still can’t address the root of the problem.”

“Our teachers and everyone else work hard to help everyone they can,” Sero snapped at him, possibly at his wit’s end with the numerous small verbal jabs from Yokohama locals like plenty of their classmates. “And what’s it with you guys? Like, I’m really starting to feel like there’s some weird prejudice going on.”

“This isn’t about biases or which side is more competent. I’m not saying you people aren’t trying hard enough either.” Tanizaki waved his hands in front of him as if dismissing the idea. “Every city’s got its shadows. You’re feeling the impact of contrast because Suribachi is an exception. Huang Zeku is a lot of things but he puts his money where his mouth is. You don’t see mayors or celebrities voluntarily moving into project neighborhoods on the outside.”

There was a very casual air to the way Tanizaki carried himself. He pointed back towards the direction of Suribachi City. They couldn’t actually see much of it from here, just an edge of the bridge connecting the main of Yokohama to it.

“Trust me, Yokohama knows how hard it is to revitalize a neighborhood. You can pour truck loads of money down the drain and it might not even get an ounce better. Getting the infrastructure up is only half the work. People’s attitudes have to change first if you want to maintain it and a big scaly and scary dragon breathing down their backs certainly works like a charm. Port Mafia likes to keep up appearances. Huang is meticulous in his standards of living. Either way, there are consequences to make sure people don’t step out of line.”

“They are executing people for expressing their thoughts and kidnapping kids for trespassing.”

Overkill. Perhaps what the dead did was unsavory or fanning some sort of flames but it didn’t warrant death by madness or to be spiked through as if they were human skewers. The mafia and Huang Corp dished out consequences that didn’t fit the crime. Harsh sentences that weren’t even passed through a court of law but decided on the whims of violent men. All rules were arbitrary here. They had no bases for the standard of punishment, other than because they should and because they *could*.

Tanizaki gave them an odd look but he didn’t argue or get irritated. All the older man did was shrugged and placed his hands in his jean pockets.

“That must be it.”

Iida pointed to the red doors at the end of the street. It was half hidden in the shadows since it was under a bridge but otherwise, it looked decently normal. Beside it, a square window had an *Opened* sign. They could see high shelves inside, the heavy wooden kind that was well-loved through time.

It didn’t look like a spacious shop or even a legitimate one.

“Go on ahead,” Tanizaki said, motioning towards the door. “I’ll wait right here. Scream if you’re in trouble.”

“Alright, everyone,” Iida said with a deep exhale. “Remember the plan.”

When they entered, Kirishima was overwhelmed by the pungent taste of herbs and dust in the air. Dried leaves and shriveled sea creatures, the baked scent of it all was so strong that he nearly choked on empty air. There was a thick layer of dust in the corners that was too tall or hard to reach and the floor creaked as they stepped over the wood.

Iida coughed, eyes turning a watery pink as they navigated in a file between high shelves. There was a scent of moldy wood lingering somewhere at the back of Kirishima’s nostrils. They passed by jars and sealed bags of spices and chipped barks, all without a price tag. There were fishes with bulging eyes preserved in bottles and other animal parts preserved by salt or dehydrated to the point where only a beak or a talon was distinctive enough.

The mafia’s informant gave them one additional instruction about finding the Dragon Pearl: They must pretend to be in the game. Give the shop owner a password and play along.

And don’t get caught.

Sero pressed the bell on the counter.

Slowly, a bald man walked out from behind flimsy curtains. He was dressed as how average grandfathers would with his polo shirt and vest. His trousers had a smudge of brown stain though, as if he had wiped his hands on them after working with the herbs. The only clean thing on him was his mustache that was long enough to reach his chest, a pure white that told of old age.

“How can I help you?” he croaked in a raspy voice. Beady eyes studied them from behind the reflection of tiny round glasses that sat over the bridge of his nose in a crooked fashion.

“We need a pound of lotus seed, four taels of each of the following: five-flavored berries, China roots, Chinese foxgloves, and goji,” Kirishima recited the long code he practiced multiple times to get right. He had no idea how to differentiate any of the herbs he just named, especially not when they were dried and prepped.

“And a pound of cangzhu,” added Iida.

There was a flicker of recognition behind the man’s eyes. He lifted a wrinkly smile. “And how would you like the cangzhu?”

“Four taels soaked in wine, four taels preserved with vinegar, four taels salted, and four taels that has been soaked in rice water.” It was Sero who answered this time, with confidence too.

The old man’s smile widened, pushing his eyes into two squinted thin lines. “Wise choice, young man. I assume you already have a pig stomach to cook the lotus seeds with? It’s best fresh.”

“No, we’re not using that.” Kirishima tried to calm his heart that was banging against his ribs, trying to escape. “We were hoping you would also sell something that we can substitute the pig stomach with. Something...more potent.”

It should be impossible but the shop owner’s smile split even wider, pushing the meat on his cheeks into two folds and revealed a mouth with very little teeth. What remained were a few yellow stubs against a backdrop of shadows. Turbid eyes turned in their sockets, scanning over Kirishima and his friends

The old man vanished behind the curtains with a speed that didn’t match his age. Soon, he returned with a wooden box. It had a greasy bottom, where some sort of white and yellow fat had solidified over the edges.

“You’ve come to the right place. This is ziheche, it will work wonders.” He pushed the box towards them, presenting curled up pieces of brown and reddish spotted...substance. That was the best Kirishima could describe it. The solid ingredient in the box was dried with a gamey texture but it didn’t resemble meat. Not porous or fibrous enough to be plants or distinguishable like mushrooms either.

“What is it? In Japanese, please.”

“Placenta.”

Kirishima gulped, feeling the back of his knees shaking slightly. “From a cow?” he asked hopefully.

The man huffed as if offended. “Human, of course. The proper kind.”

Out of the peripheral of his eyes, Kirishima noticed his friends tensing up. Iida opened his mouth but he shut it again before the shop owner could train his scrutinizing gaze on him.

“Cangzhu, lotus seed, five-flavored berries, China roots, Chinese foxgloves, and goji,” the old man recited, rambling and muttering the ingredients over and over again. “Together, they make pills to strengthen the body but any recipe is only as good as its ingredients.”

Before any of them could react, the man shaved off three tiny pieces from the lump and handed the flesh to them.

“Go on,” he ushered and his smile appeared plastered on, an inhuman mask melted into his face. The man was studying them, watching and judging if the teens were sincere in their purchases. “Try it. I only carry the authentic and the best.”

Kirishima stared at the flesh in his palm. The thought of where it came from and what it was for made his inside twist into a knot. His throat felt strained, slicking together and glued tight by mucus and bile. There was a tremble in his wrist as he tightened his hold on the placenta. He wanted no part of this. He wanted to scream and demand the old man to confess what happened to the woman he got this from. Or maybe to investigate how there was apparently a whole trade around placenta in the black market. The where and the whos and the hows.

This wasn't right.

This belonged to someone, nurturing new life and was part of a mother. Where were they now? Did they sell this voluntarily or...what would push someone to sell such a thing? Kirishima stopped his thoughts from running wild.

They wouldn't be able to help anybody by lashing out here.

Not the unknown woman or child. Not Bakugou.

So he closed his eyes and swallowed it with a gulp.

It was dry and powdery but Kirishima couldn't really register the actual taste. His focus had been on holding the piece down and not emptying his stomach over the counter right this moment.

"This is great and all," Sero said, trying to appear nonchalant but Kirishima could see the tightness in his friend's neck. Sero's Adam's apple moved a little in a swallowing motion. "But we want the actual good stuff. Not just improvements to the normal recipe."

"The product you seek is not here. This dingy old shop isn't suitable for that level of delicacies."

The old man released a cackling wheeze while sliding an envelope over the counter. "Here you are. Tomorrow night there will be a festival for ascension."

Sero reached for the envelope. Only, the shop owner suddenly slammed his hand over Sero's, holding him in place. They locked stares and Kirishima had no words to describe the fervid look beyond the man's wild eyes.

"The Dragon Pearl holds the essences of an invincible beast! Immortality is an acquired taste, young ones. Thank the heavens well. For you have made it in time to witness and be part of such holy experiences!" His hold on Sero tightened, hard enough that bony fingers dug into the back of Sero's hand.

Enough that Sero sucked back a breath as he tried to shake the old man off. Sero grabbed the envelope tight in his fist, yanking himself from.

The old shop owner didn't seem to care. He was muttering something, prayers and other intelligible words. He was pacing behind the counter, dragging his feet over the creaking wood in a heavy fashion as if he had a bad leg.

"You must be well acquainted with the guys who pulled the heist off. Huang Corp runs a pretty tight ship, am I right?" Kirishima hoped the old man couldn't hear the dryness behind his throat or that they could get a bit more information in what seemed like a fit of madness.

Or maybe not.

The shop owner's head snapped towards him and a toothless smile.

"Is that important, son?"

Yes, it should be. They were criminals who stole.

But Kirishima held back from answering. Experience from UA's lessons and his internship told him that he should try to find the culprits, to try to decipher how the crime was conducted, and why they were done. However, what would happen once they found the thieves? Would Huang Zeku be so kind as to give people that stole from him to the police? To allow the law to serve its proper justice? Or would he punish them personally, like how he took Bakugou just because the rest of them broke an arbitrary rule?

"No," Iida said firmly before the silence stretched into suspicious territory. "No, it's not."

Iida's face was dark, gloomy with a green of probably nausea. The same kind of sickness that tumbled inside Kirishima's guts probably was also twisting his.

Their goal was to find the Dragon Pearl so they could get Bakugou back. As for exactly who or how it was stolen, no one could answer that besides the actual thieves. And Kirishima couldn't believe himself but a part of him didn't want anyone to find the answer at all. Even if it was just to spare a few souls from under the dragon's claws.

Sero pulled at Kirishima's elbow and the three of them turned to leave. Kirishima could still feel the old man watching them as they moved down the short aisle leading to the door. With a final glance back, the tension that gripped Kirishima's heart morphed into a stone that dropped to the balls of his feet.

Under the flickering lights, the old man smiled wide, where his ashen skin folded over his cheekbones in layers of wrinkles and only darkness was beyond the gap of his mouth.

"To an eternal life, gentlemen."

They ended up vomiting into the bushes as soon as they were a street-some distance at least-away. The three of them couldn't stop their guts from climbing up their throats, emptying itself out with whatever bile or stomach acid it was storing.

Tanizaki handed them some tissues and water from a nearby convenience store.

"Cheer up," the orange-haired detective said as he patted Kirishima on the back. "You got what you went for, didn't you?"

That sparked the fuel of anger inside Kirishima. He snapped up, furious at the nonchalant expression and laidback tone Tanizaki used. "How can you be so calm about all this! He sold us-he made us-"

He couldn't even bring himself to finish that sentence as his gag reflex kicked in. Bending over, Kirishima felt the rush of liquid from the back of his throat. Sour and clear, there wasn't any piece of what he ingested not long ago. Nothing came out no matter how much he retched or gagged. Perhaps that piece of flesh had already become a part of him...digested and absorbed into his very blood stream.

The thought drove his face closer to the leaves, inhaling air through his nose while trying to push stuff out of his constricted throat.

"It's not like you lost anything."

The coldness in Tanizaki's voice was astounding but no longer surprising. It was Iida who stood between Kirishima and Tanizaki while Sero was still huddled at the edge of a bush.

"We should call the police," Iida proposed calmly despite how green his face was. There was a curtain of sweat over his forehead and his lips were pale as snow. "We didn't rush into things this time. We are one step closer to finding the Dragon Pearl and we didn't use our quirks. There's obviously some kind of crime going on in that herbal shop. Trafficking...I don't know. Something! If anything, they need to be investigated for selling unsafe products."

"I'm glad one of you is finally thinking ahead," said Tanizaki but he still shook his head. "No, I don't recommend calling the police right now if you want your friend back."

"Why not?"

"Because if the Dragon Pearl was exchanged hands there, then if anything happens to the shop owner, it will spook whoever has the Pearl right now. Especially if there's going to be a big event happening centering it tomorrow night."

Tanizaki appeared to be one of the more normal ones in ADA. Lanky and chill, dressed as how many college kids would with wide collared shirt and jeans. Kirishima would even say Tanizaki was an average guy amongst average dudes, no matter inside or outside of Yokohama. However, the more time Kirishima and the other UA students spent with the detectives, the more evident it was that none of them were normal. The detectives urged about seeing the bigger picture, about how delays and denials were standard if they want the bigger fishes, and about how conceding was all a part of negotiations.

But what if they don't want to give up? *Why* should they give up when there was something to be done?

Why must every victory be built on someone's suffering?

"How can you say that?" Sero actually swung a punch at Tanizaki, whose head snapped to the side as Sero's fist came into impact with his jaw.

"Sero!" Kirishima yelled just as Sero grabbed Tanizaki by the hair but his friend wasn't listening. He grabbed Tanizaki harshly and amidst the struggle, the older man's hair clip fell off while Sero shoved him against the wall.

"What if that was your mother or sister? The 'products' at that store had to come from somewhere! They are selling human parts by the pound and you want us to just overlook that completely?"

Despite his predictment, Tanizaki scoffed. The act pulled on the muscle beside his mouth, which caused him to frown but he kept talking. "No one's stopping you from going to the

cops. I said I don't recommend it and explained why. Go on, I got a phone in my pocket if you want. Call the cops or heroes or whoever else you want if that's what you feel like is the best."

Kirishima looked at Tanizaki's back pocket, where the top of his phone stuck out of his jeans. A working phone. Would they even be able to get in contact with the heroes from the outside with a Yokohama phone?

It was tempting.

"It's not like you really have to do all this to get your friend back. Huang will give him back when it's time anyway. I honestly don't know why you guys even stuck around. Huang might have given a challenge but it's not like you have to prove anything to him. You're students. Just go back outside."

"Can you shut up?" Kirishima shouted, frustrated and beyond angry. "We're doing everything we can so why is every one of you trying to beat us down in some shape or form? Not this. Can't do this. Can't do that. No. It won't work. All you people do is give up before you even try! No wonder you're being overrun by mafias! You're doing the same as them, assigning values about who deserves saving and giving up when the odds aren't in your favor."

"You outsiders are the ones who want too many things but always half-ass everything. I told you; you can try saving some unknown victim or you can keep pursuing the lead to get your friend back. You can't do both. Not with your skill level, not with the time constraint, and certainly not with what you represent. It's your choice."

"What we represent? We represent normal people!" Screaming, Sero's fist was raised for another punch. Only, his knuckles slammed through Tanizaki's head and into concrete.

Sero yelled out in pain over the sound of crunched bones while Kirishima lounged forward, having caught a flash of reddish orange out of the side of his eyes. Tanizaki—who was against the wall—melted into liquid while another was charging towards Kirishima.

"Everyone calm down!" Iida's engines throttled and he was pressed closed to Tanizaki's back. The boy with the glasses extended his arms, wrapping them around Tanizaki in a bear hug to prevent the older man from attacking as both of them skidded down the road in high speed. Except, he wasn't actually holding onto Tanizaki. The detective vaporized into thin air and with the weight suddenly gone, Iida accelerated down the stairs, only stopped by nearly crashing into the bike lane diversion at the end of the road. Something was off, Iida wouldn't have crashed that easily. Looking down, Kirishima saw how a rope had tied Iida's ankles together.

And the next thing Kirishima knew was how a knife was spearing towards him.

The short knife slide across Kirishima's hardened skin. The blade caught between the rough and uneven edges of the skin armor.

Tanizaki pulled back with the knife in the air.

"See," he said casually. There was no bruise or even a patch of red skin on his cheek where Sero had punched him. Pressing a finger to the sharp tip of the blade, he pressed down without hesitation and the blade retracted into the handle. It was a toy. "My ability is Light Snow, which lets me project illusions. I'm not the offense type nor is my ability powerful compare to what some others can do but I can hurt you three just the same. And you want to challenge a well-oiled trafficking network and Suribachi City simultaneously in your current state? It's not a fault to be the good guys but get your priorities straight."

The rope around Iida's ankles vanished, having never existed in the first place. Iida hopped back over, wincing as he swatted the dirt off the side of his pants.

"Let's get back to the office and share what you got with your friends. Yosano will fix you all up good as new too." The instruction came with a friendly smile. Average. Normal. The kind that Kirishima would have gotten from the staff at the cafe. *Transactional*. "I'll pretend that I didn't see you using your quirks...just think well and hard about how you're going to proceed."

"You can say that because it's not your friend or loved ones hurting."

That must had been the wrong response because there was a crack.

Lines radiated out of Kirishima's stomach, no matter how much he tried to hold himself together, the cracks spread along his torso and over his neck. Iida and Sero stood around him, hands raised but hesitant to touch him because he looked like he was going to shatter under the slightest touch.

Kirishima did.

He fell apart in pieces, arms flailing and trying to press the broken parts together then the air was still, crisp with a noise of paper ripping apart. When he came to, he was on the ground with hands over his neck as if still trying to keep his throat from felling out beneath his head. Inhaling hard, his breathing was so haggard and rapid that his lungs felt like props.

Tanizaki grabbed Kirishima by his collar, yanking him off the ground.

"If it's for my sister, I will eat the whole organ-animal or human and even alien-if that is what it took."

Dark eyes locked with Kirishima's and hard knuckle pressed against the bottom of Kirishima's Adam's Apple. "Don't ever judge the extent of my conviction compared to your wishy washy sense of justice and friendship. Understand?"

As unmanly as it was, Kirishima could only nod in response.

The blood in his veins felt frozen and as he looked at the dishevled state his friends were in, he couldn't help but wonder what else this cursed city was going to rob them of.

"Is there an actual right answer the hero students can give?" Kyoka asked Ranpo while the two of them were heading out of the police station. They had just finished helping the police with a case unrelated to the outsiders' troubles. Ranpo wanted to get some more treats so Kyoka followed, in case the agency's prized brain got lost again.

Ranpo might be the most intelligent detective there was (his words) but he was a disaster when it came to basic living skills.

"Of course there is, they just won't like it." Yawning, Ranpo mentioned for Kyoka to come closer. "What do you think the most important thing of being a hero is?"

"Power? Decision making?"

"That's the foundation of a hero but no, not the answer I was looking for. To be a hero, one must recognize their limits. There is nothing wrong with wanting to give a helping hand, to save people, or to do the right thing but they have to understand where the boundaries are. In other words, they need to think, not just about the situation they are in but about the resources they have at hand." Ranpo's sly smile had a hint of sympathy but it quickly vanished.

"Besides the rules, we also told them repeatedly that this city has factions and independent ability users. ADA might not be able to get Bakugou back for them directly but we have the connections and information. Not all of the ability users or groups in Yokohama are going to be afraid to go against Huang Zeku if paid the right price or approached properly. I doubt UA wouldn't pay to get their pupils back either. The best thing to do is to admit they can't find the Dragon Pearl by themselves in such a short time, get someone else more capable to steal Bakugou back from Huang Corp and meet up outside of Yokohama, where they will all be safe."

"So why don't they?" Kyoka couldn't understand the heroes. They all looked so concerned but they seemed to be running around doing a lot of...nothing.

"Because they got their heads wrapped in a bind." They reached a dessert shop, where they were served menus and Ranpo ordered quickly, already knowing what he wanted from the brochures from one of the street mascots earlier. "They are in a foreign city with no backup, at least, not the kind they are used to. Other heroes and police with quirks or authority figures they are more familiar with. Huang told them to solve this themselves. What do outside heroes do when they are faced with threats from a villain? They rise to the challenge. The cameras follow how the heroes overpower the antagonist's evil schemes when driven into a corner. That's the norm they grew up with. Plus, they are teenagers and the adults are currently either not on their side or got their hands tied. It has to be them. They are the only ones capable. The only ones who can. They are stuck in that mindset so they are having a hard time recognizing help can come in different forms. Life isn't an exam with set rules either. Their goal is to get a classmate back and make it all out safely. They can cheat. They can ask for aid. They don't have to play along to what a criminal is demanding."

Ranpo stabbed his fork into the strawberry on the chocolate cake, taking the pink fruit off its bed of sugary glaze and whipped cream.

"But that is the equivalent of admitting defeat for the outsiders."

"Exactly. Not to mention, we've been telling them that they will get Bakugou back at the end of the day no matter what. Even if it's subconsciously, it lowers the direness of the situation. The kids have something to prove so they aren't going to give up so easily."

Kyoka tilted her head, trying to digest what Ranpo explained. "Even at the expense of their friend's possible danger?"

"They won't think of it like that. It's the villain's fault something terrible is happening-and it is-just that their understanding of a successful rescue is too narrow in this case. All the pain and damage Bakugou and the other students suffered along the way, whether they looked for it themselves or not, are part of what makes a hero. Plus Ultra, right? With great pressure, comes a polished diamond." The plates piled up in front of Ranpo, scrapped clean of cake and tarts. "None of this is me trying to belittle their efforts but what's best for the victims sometimes might not be the most heroic choice. To win this game, they have to understand their best choice is to give up."

"Aren't we putting them through a little too much though?"

Kyoka still thought they were being too cruel with putting the students through all this. They weren't like newbies applying to the agency, who knew they would be tested before fully becoming an official member. Emotional trauma was a trick Port Mafia used regularly too, which Kyoka had no fond memories of.

Sighing, Ranpo stopped eating and he opened his eyes. "It has to be done. The heroes can't have this city, not the way they want and not at this time."

His voice was gentle but his gaze steeled with rock-solid determination.

"Or else it would be the end of ability users."

Chapter End Notes

Chipping away at the WIPs slowly. Trying to do something about the model Katsuki fic with Xanxus and the Strongest Duo but IDK...don't have much time to write.

Let me know your thoughts for this update and enjoy. Thanks.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1

Midoriya and Yaoyorozu went with Atsushi to get bentos for everyone.

No one felt like eating hotel buffets with everything happening and they didn't want to hog the cafe beneath the agency all the time. While ADA had staff dorms close by, their kitchens weren't suited for making large amounts of food and cooking was rather time-consuming.

Time that they don't have.

Thus, ADA started ordering from nearby bistros or diners where one of the detectives would go with a few kids to pick up individually packed meals. The job often fell on Atsushi, which Midoriya was partially thankful for. The other detectives all looked so busy and Dazai... Dazai made everybody queasy.

Ever since the talk at the warehouse, something with Dazai had shifted. The eccentric man with a morbid and self-destructive hobby was quieter, like a shadow behind the street light at night. Despite the evergreen smile, his gaze was sickly empty as if he couldn't bother to put in an ounce more effort into a friendly act.

"Are you alright, Midoriya?"

"Yep!" Midoriya picked up his pace, pushing the wagon loaded with boxes of food while Atsushi pulled at the front. Yaoyorozu had two bags of drinks. A car wasn't needed since they were only going two buildings away from ADA's office. However, Midoriya didn't get the chance to push too hard because Atsushi suddenly stopped.

There was a man coming out of the restaurant in front of them. A man in a dark coat with his black hair and fading white bangs.

Port Mafia.

"Man-Tiger," Akutagawa hissed as if the syllables were unpleasantly acrid on his tongue.

Atsushi's brows were knitted tight together. It was the first time Midoriya had seen any actual resentment on the young detective's face. "Akutagawa," he returned the acknowledgement with a harsh bite.

"I see you're still on baby-sitting duty."

"I see that you're still an asshole."

They glared at each other with equal distaste as if the other's presence alone polluted the space with nuclear waste.

"Why are the hero students still around?" Akutagawa had a look that resembled getting smacked in the face by a sock soaked in sewer water.

"They're very brave kids."

"Denser and stupider than bureaucratic inertia, you mean. This whole thing is a waste of everyone's time."

"Leave us alone."

The animosity was thick on their tongues. However, neither side showed any signs of activating their abilities. It wasn't until the sound of intentionally loud footsteps came that the two turned towards it simultaneously. The speediness in their movements held a freakish sync too.

"What an unusual pair to run into." A man smiled at them with outstretched arms as if greeting old friends. He looked American, with his sleek blond hair and cream-colored suit tailored to fit. Then, his blue eyes focused on Midoriya and Yaoyorozu. "These must be the UA hero students. You're the talk of the city!"

The man appeared friendly enough, offering no handshakes and staying at a safe social distance as if he knew they'd be wary. In any other situations, it would have been a kind and thoughtful gesture but Midoriya and Yaoyorozu both felt that something was off. Maybe it was the businessman's calculating gaze, or it could be how his body language had a complete disregard of anyone else around him. There was a woman who jogged over, out of breath as she was carrying two large bags filled with bagels.

"Francis!" she gasped, almost as a nervous warning when she spotted Midoriya and the others. "You need to stop buying so much stuff!"

"I simply couldn't resist a good sale. And see, a little fresh air is good for us. It even led us to this interesting bunch." He brushed off her complaint before turning back towards them with his impeccable smile. "A little birdie told me that you kids ran into trouble with Huang Zeku. My, my, UA truly is a trouble magnet this year. To think you'd even stirred the Dragon's interest...consider it an accomplishment, young heroes. I had to locate him personally in order to gain an audience when I first arrived in Yokohama."

Midoriya couldn't understand why this man was attempting to start a conversation. He was talking but at the same time it was a whole lot of nothing. Seeing their discomfort, Francis—as the woman had addressed him—softened his demeanor into something less flamboyant and almost worry.

"I was just wondering if you kids would like some help in getting your classmate back. Ah, don't get boarded up so fast. You see, like you lot, I too am an ability user who arrived here just a few months ago. I used to do business abroad but unfortunately I had to start over here." He shrugged, looking a little saddened but the wisp of grim was quickly wiped from

between his brows. “I have nothing against heroes either. It’s just that the more the locals get agitated by outsiders, the harder it is to conduct business. My, have you seen the stock market lately?”

“We aren’t disturbing anybody,” Yaoyorozu said with a straight face. She was right. Ever since they cleaned up the mafia’s warehouse, they hadn’t been overtly scouting the city for the dragon pearl.

“No, you don’t physically have to. So long as you’re here, all eyes are on Yokohama. Everyone wants to see how young heroes fare in the City of Sins. Likewise, Yokohama locals will judge how they would do on the outside based on their interactions with you. How your actions so far are interpreted is dependent on the person though, hence my very fluctuating stock prices.” Francis exhaled, sounding almost tired but still had that business casual formality in his tone. “That, young lady, is the cause and effect a mere presence can have. So I very kindly need you all out of Yokohama as soon as you can.”

“How do you plan on helping us?”

“This is the blueprints to the temple that you are headed to tonight. And the faces of people who suddenly became regulars recently.” He held out a flashdrive. Its silver edge gleamed under the sun with a chilling coldness. “I won’t insinuate that all of them are bad people but locating a few familiar faces and analyzing people’s behavior beforehand should be quite helpful.”

Their encounter wasn’t a coincidence. He knew what they were up to and where they were, coming to them with an enticing offer under the guise of concern.

Midoriya absolutely hated this feeling.

Ever since they stepped foot inside Yokohama, they had never been free. All these watchful eyes openly gawked at them or probed for their reactions from the shadows. The faceless audience’s gazes solidified into ropes tied around their limbs, yanking them to dance to the beats of someone else’s symphony. It felt much too orchestrated but even if they were aware of that fact, their options were still limited.

Odd enough, Dazai’s dark eyes flashed across Midoriya’s mind. It would be easy to call quits. They were backed into such a corner. All the odds stacked against them. No one would truly “vanish” at the end of this mess. They could go home and stop dealing with the headaches that were Yokohama and organized crime. They didn’t have to Plus Ultra their way forward or to anywhere really. Even their teachers said they wouldn’t face any repercussions from UA or HPSC if they agreed to end this field trip early. There was no use calling in more heroes. The mafia and the rest of Yokohama would just take that as an escalation. Everyone they encountered promised that Bakugou would be returned promptly too.

Besides, was it really a bad thing that Bakugou would be knocked down a few pegs? That he would be shown how there were leagues above them and that his talent wasn’t always going to get him out of trouble scratch free?

No. Midoriya shouldn't think like that. This was *his* fault. Bakugou wasn't the one who broke Huang Zeku's rule. He wasn't even the one who mouthed off the wrong people or picked the fight first this time. He was paying for Midoriya's mistake.

And it shouldn't be like that. Bad things shouldn't happen to those who hadn't done wrong. That was what heroes were supposed to ensure.

Also, wouldn't leaving be precisely what Yokohama wanted? An admission of defeat? That there was no hero or force in the world that could save Yokohama?

Save them from what?

The mistrust. The slight leers towards his classmates with physical mutations. The occasional mutter of mockery swirling beneath polite tongues. Haven't they been constantly lying to Midoriya and the others? Smiling to deceive them, cleaning up after the crime, and aiding all the plots the villains devised.

Were they truly worth saving?

The flashdrive dangled in front of Midoriya's eyes.

"Go on, take it."

Neither of the hero students moved. Out of his peripheral vision, Midoriya noticed how Atsushi's mouth twitched as if he wanted to say something but only silence followed. The detective was leaving the decision up to them. On the other hand, Akutagawa looked bored but he hadn't left...almost as if he was waiting for Midoriya and Yaoyorozu to make a choice.

"Why?" Midoriya found himself asking.

Francis's eyebrows arched with curiosity. "Pardon?"

"Why is Huang Zeku doing all this? Why are people—not just people with powers but the regular folks and even those like you—enabling him?"

"Because he's cool."

"What?"

"Is it that hard to figure out?" Tilting his hand, Akutagawa checked the time on his watch. "Because he's cool. You saw what happened after Hosu. People don't have to agree with the Hero Killer's ideals to find him cool. And that is when they have him on video attacking others. For Huang, you outsiders have nothing on him that couldn't be brushed off as rumours. Even if you kids go yap about what happened in Suribachi City once you return to the outside, those will just be more rumors added to the mix. He's young. He's got a nice face. He's got a reputation in *the* Yokohama. People will think of him as a man of taste. Designer and luxurious, a whole fast and furious with all the accompanying thrills."

His words felt rehearsed, purposeful in a jeering way like how a resentful relative backhandedly compliments another family member's success. A cough and two later, Akutagawa resumed his normal tone.

"UA becomes a stepping stone for his name. Why would Port Mafia care if he wants to paint a target on his back? Take the pressure off us."

As long as Yokohama produced the UA students and teachers in one piece after the field trip, any accusations or witness testimonies could be brushed off as misunderstandings. The heroes wouldn't be able to send their own investigators and judging from the xenophobic tendencies of the civilians...it wasn't hard to predict what the investigations would conclude. If they happened at all.

"Ah, so this is the hurdle that had you kids in a bind. Think of it this way, trust and notoriety can both be true simultaneously." Francis shoved the flashdrive into Yaoyorozu's hands. "Huang Corp runs on quirk licences and science. The Ministry of Internal Affairs didn't issue Huang Corp a Skilled Business Permit. They issued one for Huang Zeku. All ability users within their ranks are operating on the condition that they are under Huang Zeku's authorization. Huang himself doesn't like noise so it's rare for him to send Q out for cleaning duty. They faced no retaliation afterwards either. Do you understand what that means?"

"Francis—" The woman behind him sucked in a breath.

Francis winked at Midoriya and Yaoyorozu as he turned away. With a hand over his companion's mouth, the man ushered her down the street and they quickly disappeared into the crowd.

Instinctively, Midoriya looked to Atsushi, who averted his eyes. Besides him, Akutagawa chuckled, seeming to take pleasure in the shock that crept behind the hero students' eyes. The mafia didn't say anything else as he left.

Yaoyorozu's grip on the flashdrive tightened as she met Midoriya's eyes. The same understanding passed between them. Francis couldn't have been more clear in what he was implying.

The bloodbath they witnessed in Suribachi City was sanctioned by the government.

"I must say the ADA's method of teaching the kids a lesson is rather unconventional. Squandering their self-esteem and crushing their worldviews so harshly is quite cruel," Francis laughed as he found Akutagawa waiting for them around the corner of an apartment.

"Says the person who proposed this additional act at the last minute." Rolling his eyes, Akutagawa stifled a cough behind his hand. "Still, I can't believe that's what that Midoriya guy asked about. 'Why?' Such a pointless question. They are looking for reasons when they should be searching for solutions."

“It’s commendable though. That shows he’s thinking about other possible angles to solve the problem. To understand the other side so the same mistake or tragedy doesn’t happen again.”

“Is it mandatory to have a reason before someone can commit crime on the outside?” Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “Sometimes people do it just because. Huang certainly isn’t coming up from the world is unjust and I must get my dues kind of perspective when he does his creepy things.”

“You are rather talkative today.”

“You’re deviating from the script,” said Akutagawa flatly. “What’s the rush?”

“The League of Villains is in Yokohama. They are a gathering of small fries but their quirks do prove troublesome. I’d prefer my search for The Book to have less competition and obstacles. So I send them on their merry way to Suribachi’s young prodigy!” Francis laughed, a bit of mischief twinkled behind his eyes as pride saturated his tone. “Suribachi is a bad matchup for anyone not born in Yokohama that’s for sure!”

He knew that first hand.

The first time Francis met Huang Zeku, the teen was butchering a pig.

In the traditional market on the outskirts of Suribachi City, the stalls were made from wood and cheap PVC or steel sheets. Carts and bicycles weaved between each other, brushing past the crowd of people walking about. Some of the carts covered in cardboard signs were stationed along the walls while fresh produce was laid on a piece of tarp in front of beat up tricycles. A few larger trucks were parked further back, where the owners were busy unloading products into their stalls. Of the number of scattered buildings that stood amongst the mess, hoses and circuits extended out from the walls. A complex web of cords and extensions were carefully placed to the side, following the road at a safe distance from the drainage ditch.

Francis had not been impressed by the primitive and unhygienic environment.

He could hear the hum of fans and a low rumble from the cheap generators that the further stalls were using. Occasionally, children’s shrilling voices pierced through the noise of the market. Between the peddlers advertising their products with megaphones and the middle aged women haggling in front of the stalls, Francis and his subordinates stuck out like a sore thumb as they navigated the market. Crates of vegetables sprinkled with dirt and dew greeted them around the corner while plastic bins filled with fishes stared at them as they passed. A few times, Francis had to duck out of the way or else the chicken in their crates would have given his shiny suit a peck.

Obviously, it was impossible to have a graceful entrance in such conditions. Francis couldn’t land his helicopter in the middle of the road like he did when he visited ADA either. They had arrived at Suribachi City with the same dramatic flare though, landing the helicopter on Huang Corp’s helicopter pad (a step better than ADA, Francis supposed) and the dozens of armed guards that greeted them was an expected sight.

What was abnormal was what followed.

A man greeted them at Huang Corp's tower. Well dressed enough for a niche company of a mere island nation, he was everything Francis expected of a low-tier businessman. Unsophisticated with his average features and a beer belly common in male corporate executives of late middle age, he had more mustache than hair. Unlike the ADA's president, this man was much too weak both in presence and demeanor. Though, Francis supposed he shouldn't compare the commonfolks to a veteran ability user.

In the meeting room where a giant Buddha statue sat, the man listened to Francis without interrupting him, not even when Francis dived into a long spill of boasting about his own success and mocking Huang Corp. Even when Francis proposed to buy out the entire company, the man continued to listen with a smile that mirrored the Buddha statue's. At first, Francis thought it was a tactic to stall for time but as the clock ticked by, something felt off. It wasn't with the room itself or even about the tea that was served. The room was well furnished and the tea brewed of decent quality, better than ADA's regular grocer brand anyway. What was odd was that the man had only spoken two sentences to him.

"Our Founder is unavailable at the moment."

"You are welcome to wait or book a meeting for next week."

No matter what Francis said, the man only repeated the same two lines with his smile unchanged. It wasn't until Francis asked flatly if killing him or making the other employees disappear would force Huang Zeku to show himself.

Hearing that, this man—quirkless and powerless and weak as an ant—stretched a wider smile where even the ends of his mustache curled in delight. And Francis got his third sentence:

"Nothing can influence the Dragon's whims."

A secretary escorted them out. Francis had no doubt that the employees of Huang Corp were afraid, evident in the occasional gleam of fear behind their eyes and their pasty white faces. After all, the Guild's intel was very clear that Huang Corp was built centralizing around Huang Zeku himself. Boy prodigy or not, one person attempting to take on the whole Guild would be as laughable as a mantis trying to stop a speeding car.

However, something about the employees here unsettled Francis. The woman in the elevator with them had the same plastered smile as the man. Like many of the other female employees they encountered, she was dressed in a dark uniform with a red cloud collar embroidered with a lotus pattern while twin red tassels draped down her front. Immaculate in appearance and posture, she released a small gasp when Lucy stored her away into Anne's Room. They left the cloud collar on the elevator ground and walked out of Huang Corp without being stopped.

Everything Francis encountered in Huang Corp so far had been textbook. Plain and expected, from the people to the company environment all fitted the Guild's profile and analysis. A start up that hit the jackpot. Modern buildings with hints of tacky and gangstery tastes still evident in the details. Even the level of hostility felt tame...which was all within Francis's expectations. Francis had full confidence in his prize strategist, Louisa, and her ability to

predict their enemies' moves. Except that, this time, the smoothness of how everything progressed had not brought Francis any sense of pride in the brilliance of the Guild's plans.

Francis's main goal was still ADA and Port Mafia. The only reason why he was in Suribachi City was to try his luck at obtaining a Skilled Business Permit from different avenues and to confirm with his own eyes that all the variables were under control before launching his full plan. Rumors and bloated hearsay aside, a genius who was supposed to have murdered many must have some merit to him that would make the Special Division of Unusual Powers (fools who wouldn't take Francis's bribe) pardon all his crimes, allowing him to conduct business as usual in Yokohama. Also, the more intel they obtained, the stronger and more accurate Louisa's ability to strategize became.

Hence this slop of a market and the meat stall where a thin man wearing a blue plastic apron with splatters of pink. The top of the meat stall had a blinking lamp. It flickered, casting a glint off the man's thick glasses. Slabs of meat lined besides a large cutting board that had a chip at the edge from frequent usage. Brushing off flakes of pink and red from his yellow gloves, the butcher placed his wide rectangular knife down after one glance at Francis's group.

He gestured towards the back, lifting the cheap curtain behind him to reveal a path that led to a clearing of cobblestone courtyard and a giant pig.

Freshly dead on a table that was covered by a red plastic tarp. It was large enough that it would need four men to lift it. A low noise of flowing liquid came but it wasn't from any decorative ponds or a stream. It originated from where a tube stuck out of the pig's neck and blood drained into a giant black sake cup the size of a bin. Patches of the ground were wet, rinsed through while three freshly butchered chickens dangled from a metal rack.

How barbaric.

"Hey Pops! Zeku-sama has guests!" the butcher shouted.

On the other side of the pig, an old man was playing weiqi under a lone willow tree. Across from the game was a young man with long crimson hair that spilled over his back like a waterfall of blood. Dressed in a white magua jacket and dark trousers, two loops of rosewood beads wrapped loosely around his neck. Meanwhile, hoops of jade with dangling black tassels decorated his ears. Against the backdrop of bricks and cobble stones with the tiled roofs, it was a scene spliced from an oriental movie, where the characters had that pale ivory complexion and striking features brushed like the sharp strokes in ink paintings—except that blood was used as the medium of this art.

Seated on a plastic stool, Huang Zeku ignored Francis's introduction. His focus was centered on the game before him. Thus, Francis squeezed the old man off his stool and shoved the opened briefcase filled with cash over the game board. Black and white stones clattered to the ground as Francis made the same offer to purchase Huang Corp.

"Speak then." Huang Zeku yawned and the weiqi stones fell from his fingers back into their box. The corners of his mouth sagged as sharp red eyes peered at Francis from underneath

long bangs. However, Francis couldn't gauge any sense of defensiveness or irritation over the ruined game. "Your proposal."

"I already made my offer."

After staring at Francis for a few seconds, Huang Zeku snapped his fingers and a woman appeared behind him. "Do we have stocks from any of his companies?" the teen asked. "Sell it all, now."

"Yes, Zeku-sama."

"Fire your team," suggested Huang Zeku, his indifferent tone unchanged as he turned back to address Francis. "Hard to imagine professionals would evaluate the entirety of a corporation at the same price as ADA's tiny office. You came with an acquisition proposal but have no budget, no contracts, not even a visionary pitch. Sure is an interesting way to run your operations though."

Huang Corp had their own intelligence web for Huang Zeku to know that Francis presented the same briefcase of cash to ADA. Still, Louisa anticipated being rejected too. Francis tapped the table lightly and his subordinate presented a stack of papers.

"You don't have to worry about me not having enough funds," Francis assured with a smirk while Huang Zeku flipped through the pages.

Not a minute later, the stack of paper was thrown back at him, scattering across the stacks of cash and a few were brushed to the ground by the wind. Water soaked through the pages, where pink blurred with the ink.

"The units on page ten used the metric system. Yokohama goes by shakkanho."

Which meant all the calculations and projected values were meaningless. Francis's smile didn't waver though. A minor issue, really. Louisa was a great strategist but not a professional lawyer or financial analyst. There were bound to be miniscule details that she couldn't cover. Not that it mattered much in their Yokohama expedition. At least, not in Francis's opinion. They already declared war with Port Mafia and ADA. In order to carry out Francis's plan of acquiring The Book, he was bound to make an enemy out of Huang Corp sooner or later too. He wasn't at all serious about acquiring Huang Corp through regular avenues but it appeared that Huang Zeku had the patience to consider an offer. A little surprising but not too much. Who could blame a teenager wanting to cash in big? So young and so short-sighted, bending under an enticing offer was typical.

In that case...

"Name your price then, young man. ADA said that there are things in the world which money can't buy but you look smart--"

"Have you ever splurged on something just because?" Huang Zeku suddenly interrupted him. Calm and neutral, there was not an ounce of spite towards Francis's purposeful belittlement.

The teen had little care over Francis's attempt to establish superiority and spared more attention to the cooler at his feet than the enemies standing right in front of him.

Pale fingers searched through the ice, locating a glass bottle of soda. Plastered in bright colours, it was an easily recognizable drink favored by Japanese children. The jade bangle and crimson agates slipped down Huang Zeku's wrist, where the colours contrasted sharply against his white skin. In truth, Huang Zeku had rather feminine features and his bones had yet to become fully built enough in the eyes of grown men such as Francis. Huang Zeku didn't appear to have that unwavering resolve of dedicated veterans or even the calculating gleam of criminals seasoned in organized crime either. Careless and almost slothful, he felt more like the type to answer "whatever" to any and all questions presented.

It was rather fascinating to think that the ability users of Japan would come to fear such a child. But Francis supposed that was just additional proof of incompetence of Japan's criminal underworld. After all, All Might and the other heroes looking to establish a name had crushed all sleazy organizations outside of Yokohama.

"Plenty of things! Like this watch--"

"I happened upon people preparing a baby shower," Huang Zeku interjected again. Ignoring Francis's darkened expression, he pointed at the direction of the pig with the soda. The old man and butcher forced a smile. "So I think Suribachi City needs some fireworks today."

Spinning the bottle between his fingers, he pressed down on the marble sealing the drink. Instead of the *pop* of an opened bottle, Francis and the others heard it first before their eyes registered the shadow looming over them. A boom louder than fighter jets taking off. A sound that pierced through the noise of the market and speared through the sky. Heat followed, brushing past the top of Francis's head the rest of the world faded into silence.

The monster coiled around the willow tree, its giant mouth opened wide as a pillar of flames and heat blasted into the air. Long claws dragged across the bark while three bulging eyes spun in their sockets, turning downwards towards the humans in the courtyard. Kneeling upon the ground, the old man and butcher muttered shaky prayers under their breaths.

Francis wasn't unfamiliar with gigantic creatures created through abilities or quirks. One of his own subordinates could summon a whale that weighed tons and it was a magnificent sight. However, Francis couldn't find any fantastical beauty in the ivory creature before him.

"God..." his subordinate muttered behind him. And yes, *God*, what an abhorrent sight!

Static filled Francis's right ear and an incoherent clamour of panic glitched against his eardrum.

A soft clink called Francis's attention back to Huang Zeku. The teen twirled the soda bottle gently, letting the marble within roll around in the fizzy liquid. "The Guild is a secret society," Huang Zeku said as if recalling an urban rumor passed between the mouths of school children, "filled with important figures deep with aristocratic backgrounds or highly involved in politics and finance. With your connections, you were able to give your members diplomatic immunity in other countries while they carried out your dirty deeds."

He pointed up as the chaos intensified in Francis's ear.

"But should it be discovered that foreign diplomats are operating an invisible aircraft over Japan's air space...can a cheque smooth that over too?"

He knew.

The Guild had turned a whale created from their member's ability into an—*invisible and undetectable*—weaponized fort. It was their secret ace and a critical part of Lousia's most effective plan for The Book. But that dragon had nearly shot it out of the sky, missing the whale by barely an inch from what Francis gathered from the frantic communication in his ear.

Francis didn't need anything more to understand that all The Guild had done since they stepped foot in Suribachi City had been pointless. Huang Zeku could have blasted Moby Dick out of the air any time he wanted.

He merely *chose* not to.

This was his warning.

The dragon lowered itself, circling its large body around its master as if shielding the teen. For a moment, the muscles on Francis's back tensed as he got ready to activate his ability. However, the dragon didn't attack. Its scaly tail swept the sake cup filled with pig blood closer and it lifted the whole thing with one claw, pouring the liquid into its mouth in an impossibly human manner. All greedy gulps and scarfing slurps, blood leaked between its fangs, raining down around Huang Zeku who wasn't one bit disturbed. From under the shadows, his red eyes had a sinister shine to them as he lifted a smile—sharp enough that Francis expected him to have a taste of the same red the dragon was having.

Francis's hand suddenly shot out in front of Anne's face and closed into a fist. A polished weiqi stone sat in his palm, cracking a little under pressure. Letting the piece fall to the ground, Francis watched as Huang Zeku picked up another stone.

"You have something of mine," Huang Zeku said softly.

Shuddering, Anne took an involuntary step back. And Francis couldn't help but laugh aloud even as he felt his temple throbbed dangerously in fury. A checkmate this was. Clean and irrefutable. Terrorism wasn't a charge that could be waived or downgraded with legal jargons and excuses of personal feuds. Although Francis was fully willing to take the consequence of tanking the entirety of Yokohama, it was not the right time to play this card. Not with Port Mafia and ADA both still fully operational and the Special Division of Unusual Powers ready to pounce on The Guild with the slimmest of reasons. *Especially* not with a dragon ready to take out the whole of Moby Dick upon command either.

"I see why you're considered a recalcitrant now," scoffed Francis. Perhaps that was a trait all the damn cold-blooded reptilians shared: Striking only when it was certain its kill would be swift and deadly. The slothfulness was all a facade.

Huang Zeku raised his bottle up in the gesture of a cheer.

There were many other memorable things that Francis had learned since he arrived at Yokohama. Still, the teen who held Suribachi City tight in his clutches certainly left a strong impression. And he must admit, he was curious how the so-called “villains” would fare in front of the contradiction that was Huang Zeku. A difficult negotiator and an even worse leader. The criminals would certainly have a headache to deal with.

He sure hoped that the League of Villains wouldn’t end up with a stroke. Or perhaps, that would be a more merciful way to go.

2

Huang Corp’s tower was always busy.

The sound of people working on their computers filled the air and small chatter of discussions chirped all over. A few phones went off and the meeting rooms were often fully booked for the day. In the labs, machines and technicians moved in sync while pipes pumped chemicals into giant glass cylinders growing synthetic flesh.

Turn down the corner and the noise of boots slapping against the floor was mixed with the rhythm of heels and shoes clicking against the tiles. Patrol—in their unmistakable dark uniforms—were making rounds while the other employees were busy with various tasks and greeting clients.

On the floor of Huang Zeku’s office, the administrators and a few executives were having a small coffee break. Someone opened the window, letting in a nice fresh breeze that carried the buzzing noise of the city.

“Miyasaki, don’t you think Zeku-sama is acting a little weird?” Ikeda placed a bunch of folders on her colleague’s desk.

Being Zeku’s executive assistant, Miyasaki knew their boss’s schedules and personal ticks the best. Her desk was right outside Zeku’s office door too, giving her the front row seat to whoever entered and all the drama.

“He’s a teenager with a pet dragon and develops fake limbs for a living. You have to define *weird* more precisely.” Miyasaki shrugged as she fixed her wavy hair.

It was hard to deal with adolescents, let alone one with special powers. Most of Suribachi’s locals learned to not ask questions and simply accept everything their young boss did as normal. Riding a horse down the street? Normal. Drinking bubble tea atop of a random roof? Have at it. Intermittently murderous or chewing on corpses? That was completely healthy behavior!

Ikeda frowned, trying to think of an example. “He’s wrapping up work early.”

“He isn’t looking at everybody and everything—including the plants—like they owe him a million yen,” someone else muttered into their coffee.

“The lab crew downstairs said he’s nicer when he answers questions.”

“Coiled Dragon looks more...giddy? Excitable?”

The crowd shivered. Be it a happy dragon or an angry dragon, nothing good ever came from beasts in a mood. Even dogs could wreck a home when they were running high, no one wanted to see the kind of damage a dragon over the moon could cause.

“We are hosting a guest.” Miyasaki pointed above. She didn’t stress her words or provide any non-verbal cues but the rest of the office fell into a silence. A “guest”. Yes. There was certainly a teenager from outside of Yokohama in this tower, not affiliated with any of their own employees or acting on behalf of another organization. They were indeed “hosting” him too. Food and board and all.

At least, that was what they were told.

It had nothing to do with intelligence but those who wished to live long in Yokohama never asked too many questions. Knowledge was a Russian roulette of poison where no one ever knew if knowing too much or too little was more potent. They were told a version of the story by their superiors, then it must be the truth.

No matter how absurd.

“It was a bad idea letting heroes in.”

“I mean, we do like their business. Money is money no matter the source.”

“Finance and Audit would say otherwise.”

“We’re not...going to war with the heroes, are we?”

The question remained unanswered as the tension intensified into a deafening silence. Most of those present didn’t have special powers. Even for those who did possess a quirk or ability, they weren’t particularly the combat-oriented kind.

For the majority, they couldn’t swear they hated the heroes with a passion, at least not wholeheartedly as if the Costumes had personally murdered their families or caused some sort of irreparable damage. Sure, they could adore a pretty face or be amazed by flashy moves and cheesy lines. But it wasn’t so different from celebrity intrigue or teenage crushes in this age of parasocial internet connections. They were, however, aware that the outsiders didn’t carry the same kind of sentiments towards them.

To the outside world, they were all “villains”.

Be it their backgrounds or bad blood in some long gone past, maybe a connection to some convicted felon alone would do the trick. Records could be wiped and histories forgotten but quirks and abilities don’t lie. A “villainous” quirk. An ability that was different. Or perhaps none at all and thus, outcasts they were.

Also, they had enough gang activities as they did. None of them wanted to have to deal with more criminals from the outside who wanted notoriety. Wealth was tangible and replenishable, infamy on the other hand, could only ever be built from blood and pain.

They had finally found a semblance of peace in the turmoil times, which the outsiders would surely dismantle with their investigations and spotlights.

“Kyuusaku-kun, do you know what’s going on?”

The crowd turned towards the youngest amongst them. The whole company was used to having Kyuusaku around, watching the kid roam the halls, drawing on the walls, and being chased by the janitor crew or the tutors.

“I don’t know!” Pouting, Kyuusaku hopped out of the office chair that they had been spinning around on. They ran out of the office, into the hall and squeezed into a dumbwaiter, leaving the employees dumbfounded.

“What’s gotten into Kyuusaku?”

“Who knows? Children are moody.”

Not like Kyuusaku had a great role model in a boss that came and went like a shadow either.

The chatter continued but there was still a weight in the air that no joke could seem to get rid of.

Sighing, Miyasaki clapped her hands and gestured for everybody to return to work. “I’m sure it’s fine. If anything, Zeku-sama has it handled. The same for Kyuusaku. In the meantime, we got a company to keep running.”

Kyuusaku was not having a good time.

Having a hostage was supposed to be fun. Maybe they couldn’t kill the guy but it would have been entertaining to tease and scare the hero student into scuttling like mice with a cat on its tail. Cowering and shaken, fearful and broken or lashing out like some depraved cage animal. It would be the closest thing to the madness that Kyuusaku loved. Heroes weren’t special. They were blood and flesh and breakable all the same.

But that all pinned on the guy being a *hostage*.

Before, while Dad was busy with work, Kyuusaku would be left alone with toys, books, or tutors. Zeku didn’t care how Kyuusaku spent their time if no one was visibly dead (or maimed) at the end of the day. Now with another person in the penthouse, Kyuusaku no longer had the same freedom.

There was somebody else sharing the space and worst of it all, Bakugou Katsuki was a perfectionist. He nagged at Kyuusaku about cleaning up after themselves, arranged three

proper meals with vegetables a day and locked all the treats away. On top of all that, there was someone who was actually monitoring Kyuusaku's homework progress.

It was hell.

And Kyuusaku was about to burst from having to keep all the emotions bottled up within. For once, Kyuusaku hated how they had no one to talk to other than a cursed doll.

Telling the aunties and uncles that Dad was dating would be disastrous. They would probably think Zeku was ill or that some quirk or ability had possessed him. Because Dad kissing someone else was about as normal as Coiled Dragon going vegan. Satan would crawl out of a space portal in a frilly maid's dress before that happened.

Not a single soul would believe Kyuusaku.

And Bakugou knew that.

He was smug about it too. Hogging Dad's attention with a pretty bat of his eyes while switching out Kyuusaku's chips with baked kale. **Baked. Kale.**

Ew!

Bakugou was totally getting back at Kyuusaku for calling him names.

This had to END!

Kyuusaku found the opened maintenance shaft and slipped in, climbing down a ladder into a tunnel of cords and wires. It was a tight space, where pipes and tubes that Kyuusaku wasn't fully sure what purpose they served connected throughout Huang Corp's tower but he knew who he would find down here.

Zeku was seated over a beam of metal that served as a stepping platform when workers needed to do maintenance inside these shafts. Cold, blue light casted over his features as a strand of long hair fell in front of his eyes but he was focused on his work.

He had taken Kyuusaku down here a few times, at ease with the lifeless tranquility. He guided Kyuusaku through the secret passages behind metal ledges and wired panels once, warning that those unfamiliar with the space would be lost and trapped in this vertical maze.

There was a hologram projection against the wall, where it showed one of the ADA detectives taking three hero students to a herb store.

"They think the worst of us." Kyuusaku pouted while settling down beside Zeku. Pulling their knees close to their chest, Kyuusaku leaned over, looking at the numbers running along the tablet in Zeku's lap instead of the hologram. "It's just placenta too. ADA's so soft on them and they're still freaking out. It's not like we cut off their internet. Even typing into a search engine is too much detective work for these idiots, huh?"

No reply came but Kyuusaku didn't need any.

“It’s the bias. It’s the stress. The heroes think that whatever deviates from the norm they see must be suspicious and evil. They are the worst hypocrites.”

Calling themselves heroes when all they wanted to save was their own ego, to be praised for how right and great they were. The heroes were dumb. The whole concept of heroes was dumb.

“What do you see in Bakugou?” Kyuusaku grumbled as they shook Zeku’s arm. “You even got him embroidered shoes and jade bangles. He’s loud and obnoxious, has a foul mouth, and he nags about every little thing nonstop. Just demanding all around! He scolds me too! Me! How can you let him do that? We can’t let the heroes walk all over us!”

Kyuusaku couldn’t wrap their head around why Zeku was putting up with this nonsense. He was the Dragon of Suribachi City. He fought ability users much more powerful than those stupid heroes without faltering and tangled with the smartest of detectives in their mind games. Suribachi was his to command. He could have anything and anyone.

There was absolutely no need for a man like Zeku to cave to an outsider’s every demand.

Leaning over, Kyuusaku stretched themselves across Zeku’s lap, trying to get the older teen’s attention. Unaffected by Kyuusaku’s added weight, Zeku continued to type on the tablet. It wasn’t until Kyuusaku started waving their arms in front of the screen that Zeku sighed.

Gesturing for Kyuusaku to sit up properly, he asked, “What do the regular citizens get out of the hero system?”

Such a strange question. “For someone to protect them of course.”

Without lifting his gaze off the screen, Zeku made a small noise that was half a sardonic laugh and half disgust.

“For legal violence,” he corrected coldly. “Heroism is a performance. They cheer on one person to beat another into submission. Flashy moves, dramatic costumes, a catchphrase, anything and everything to appeal to an audience and capture eyeballs. There is excitement in spilled blood—real blood—one that most people wouldn’t admit. Thus, heroes. The ones who would dirty their hands and provide a platform of moral high ground. The news and the merchandise, everything is a colorful game. It makes their enjoyment of violence and willingness to pay for it palatable.”

“That makes Bakugou even more of a moron than I originally thought he was,” Kyuusaku muttered with puffed cheeks. After all, only an idiot would be happy to make a clown of themselves for headlines and attention. What good was power if its use could only be determined by the mindless crowd? Trusting those who lived in peace to decide that was the same as cutting off an arm before entering a fight. These heroes, no matter how high they climbed in ranks, all felt like pawns to be discarded eventually. Forgotten, aged out, dead... just symbols to show people what to be and what not to be. Plus, if anything went wrong, the ones up top could throw out a morsel of scandal to divert attention. The crowd was appeased and the system was balanced. “And the outsiders think *we* are the brainwashed ones.”

“That is why Katsuki chose to become a hero.” Zeku paused the replaying surveillance video of the 1-A students.

Seeing Kyuusaku’s confused frown, Zeku pulled out an aerial view of Yokohama on the hologram. He traced the borders with a finger, pointing to the farmlands and mines.

“Yokohama can be self-sufficient but any circular system is delicate. One disaster or accident can throw everything off. The outsiders don’t have to worry about that.”

“How does that relate to Bakugou?”

Zeku didn’t provide any straight answers as he asked, “What is the main conflict between the outside and Yokohama?”

“Yokohama is the only place without the hero system. We prove they are redundant.”

Nodding, Zeku continued, “There are no heroes who came from Yokohama or openly advertised as an ability user. Not Port Mafia or the other organization’s spies. Not even normal civilians who caught the hero fever. Why?”

“Because the outsiders are suspicious of anyone with a Yokohama background or even linked to it,” Kyuusaku said with certainty as more thoughts stormed inside their head. “To become a hero, they have to start before high school. Even if we recruit students originally from the outside, there’s no way to build loyalty in kids that young. They won’t understand Yokohama at all. The ability users on the outside...HPSC would rather persuade them to join the military instead. Which doesn’t make sense. Wouldn’t it be better to put at least one doofus on, no matter how low a rank? To show people that ‘Hey! Everyone is accepted out here! Come join us!’ and whatnots?”

“And let the world see the difference between an ability and a quirk? To grant an ability user or someone who might be inclined towards Yokohama clearance to hero databases and government information?”

Kyuusaku shrunk a little, realizing their mistake. Abilities were different from quirks, especially in the sense that plenty had a wider range than what quirks could accomplish. While it wasn’t impossible to neutralize an ability with specialized equipment and prisons, it was considerably more difficult of a task than putting quirks out of commission. From the outsiders in charge’s standpoint, it was probably more risky to prevent information leaks than to nip the possibility in the bud.

“Would HPSC consult the Special Division of Unusual Powers or even the Hunting Dogs before they raid Yokohama?”

“Absolutely not.” Kyuusaku would never do that if they were in HPSC’s shoes. Hell, Kyuusaku barely even believed the whole collaboration and transparency thing between the outside police and Yokohama ones. And those were for the regular felonies. Sure, they could bribe partnerships with senior politicians from the outside but none of those people would truly understand what Yokohama needed either.

Zeku hummed, his expression unchanged but he sounded pleased with the answer. “We need eyes and ears on the outside. Local and known. The right face and the right quirk. History and credentials that are authentic. Most importantly, Katsuki cares about Yokohama more than anyone else.”

“Still, why him? He’s not even an ability user! What does someone who has never put his life on the line for anything know about hardships? We can handle our own problems. He’s just a hero guy chasing fame and bloating his ego like the rest of them suckers. He just wants to flaunt his flashy explosion quirk around to feel big. And he’s not even doing it well. They hated him at the Sports Festival.” Kyuusaku’s protest grew louder, filled with bitter acid. “I don’t like him. Let’s get rid of him and we’ll replace him with someone better. He knows nothing about Yokohama! He’s not even from here!”

“Neither am I.”

There was something about Zeku’s voice that forced Kyuusaku’s words to become stuck in their throat. Not quite fiery anger or deep sorrows, but there was a rawness behind Zeku’s words where it felt like he was forcing the syllables out from under a tongue filled with glass shards. A hand was placed on the side of Kyuusaku’s face, gentle enough that it hovered just a bit above their skin. Kyuusaku’s head hung lower, unable to look up and meet Zeku’s eyes. It wasn’t that they were afraid of arguments but that they didn’t want to.

A quiet voice inside told them that if they did, they would see something that would break the illusion of Dad that Kyuusaku had worked so hard to convince themselves of. Dad was not Dad. They always knew that. Age didn’t matter. Just enough of a father. Not really a father. Not *Kyuusaku’s* father. But playing house felt safe, felt like they belonged and wouldn’t get tossed out like how all ragged dolls eventually end up in the trash. A child needed a father. A father would protect the child. And it was true so far, wasn’t it? With food and a roof over their heads, Kyuusaku had free roam of Huang Corp. They received gifts on holidays, got scolded for pulling stupid stunts, had pointers for homework, got their report cards signed off, and were even allowed the occasional begging to get Zeku to buy them something useless but pricey. Kyuusaku got away with so many things, worming their way around the Dragon’s den as if it was their own.

It “*felt*” family enough.

Belatedly, Kyuusaku wondered if they had mistaken leniency with caring. Before they could say something to rectify the situation though, the hand by their face no longer held any semblance to a man’s. Long, sharp talons tapped lightly over Kyuusaku’s cheekbone and the fluorescent lights above casted a pale blue hue over the hard scales.

Kyuusaku could feel a sticky dampness spreading down their back.

“Where I came from, they host celebrations in the form of tournaments to the death. Anyone and everyone could enter. There is only one rule: Survive. My father was the champion for eight straight years.” Zeku’s voice sounded far away, colder than the icy draft escaping the air vents. It scraped down against the back of Kyuusaku’s neck like a sheet of razored ice, peeling away his skin like how hunters prepared an animal’s hide slowly. “Now that was an audience true to their hearts. They screamed until their throats were torn when Father ripped

his opponents apart. The front row seats had to be reinforced to prevent people from trampling each other just to be bathed in rain of blood and flesh from the arena.”

The nostalgia enveloped his words in a thick coat of longing. There was even a hint of sorrow, as if there would never be a greater gift than to return to witness those glorious battles in person again. Or rather, he pitied the oblivious who would never understand such heated ecstasy that could boil their veins.

Kyuusaku wasn't unfamiliar with madness. After all, they had been surrounded by it since they were born. A mistake. A regret. Anything and everything could drive a soul to insanity. Countless people were destroyed by Kyuusaku's power. Maniacs and psychopaths too, hadn't Kyuusaku seen it all? Depraved thrill chasers who wanted nothing but destruction and blood. Bereaved souls wishing others to share their pain. There were too many to keep track. But their madnesses didn't make Kyuusaku shiver as they were right now. It didn't make sense. Shouldn't Kyuusaku get excited about a place where everyone would appreciate breaking people apart like they had done? Where the strong prevailed and bloodshed was the answer to everything?

Yet, the jitter gnawed inside their joints, making their toes curl inside their boots from imagining such a place. Men and women, staring at Kyuusaku with such intense hunger, obsessing to be impaled by their curse instead of breaking down. That wasn't how this game was supposed to be. What good was their ability if people no longer feared it?

Without fear, Kyuusaku was no different than any regular child. Easy to silence, easy to make disappear...easy to end up in a jar like those in that hero's lair or shoved under dirt like what Mori did to those that no longer served his plans.

Their face paled as sweat soaked between the creases of their clenched palms.

“And it is not that ‘we’ are handling our problems. *I* am handling the problems, which you happen to be one of.”

Zeku's disappointment was accompanied by the scent of agarwood and lotus, mixed with the thickening strangely deep musk that Kyuusaku often smelled on Coiled Dragon.

“You have no control over Dogra Magra and showed little improvement in martial arts training. I gave you tutors but you'd rather waste your time fooling around and judging others like a town's gossip. If it weren't for the element of surprise and people cleaning up after you, the likes of you would never last past the first round of the tournament. I thought I saw potential but you proved to be as incompetent as the heroic pests.”

“Potential...?”

The question was choked out of Kyuusaku's dry throat. What Kyuusaku really wanted was to tell Zeku to shut up, that they would stop asking about Bakugou so cut out the scary act. Kiss the hero guy. Fine. Just turn the page and they could go back to how things were. They would work harder too. Kyuusaku would even be nice to “Mom”. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up! But deep down, they knew the truth in Zeku's words. As powerful as Kyuusaku's ability was, the

easiest way to counter them was to kill them before the curse was activated. This close in a confined space, Zeku wouldn't even need a full minute to rip Kyuusaku apart.

Zeku didn't grant Kyuusaku that mercy.

Leaning closer, strands of his red hair fell into Kyuusaku's view as if caging their world in blood. The lips by their ear whispered quietly, where the phonetics were distorted into a hiss as if the sounds had rolled off a serpent's tongue. But Kyuusaku understood with a tremor.

"I killed my father."

The end of Zeku's claw brushed away a loose strand of Kyuusaku's hair that fell in front of their eyes. Kyuusaku's heart pounded, expanding and slamming against the inside of their ribcage with such force that they could feel their whole chest straining to contain it from exploding. In front of them, they could see thick bundles of twisting purple and red flesh—connected between scales—along Zeku's transformed arm. The tissues seemed to pulse and Kyuusaku could almost feel how each beat took another breath from their lungs.

"Father, Mother, and so many more...I devoured it all but it still wasn't enough." The laugh that followed was hollow, containing more anger than languishing over the loss of bonds. "But the world is a show that will go on no matter what. The stage may differ but the performance is all the same. What can be chosen is the performers. The hotheaded hero guy you're so eager to put down asked me to dance and so we did. You were supposed to be an interlude in Port Mafia's playbook. How unfortunate for me though."

The claw tilted, forcing Kyuusaku to look up as well. They were met with a pair of malicious eyes. Monstrous and bestial, where the whites should be were replaced by deep violet and Zeku's pupils had constricted into thin slits in ponds of gold. Rings of red swirled within the gold, hypnotizing in a dangerous fashion where Kyuusaku felt like a butterfly pinned to a board, ready to be taken apart piece by piece.

"就算爛到泥裡，依然有人願你安康樂喜。 (Even if you are lower than mud, someone still wishes for you to live a blessed life.)"

His words slowly turned the rusting gears inside Kyuusaku's head. A task that would be difficult in normal situations as Kyuusaku wasn't that familiar with the foreign syllables to begin with, let alone when every nerve in them was strung to a taut. Before Kyuusaku could digest the sentence though, the windchime above them sounded, releasing a soft jingle that echoed between the wires and metal.

"We have guests." Zeku shoved the tablet into Kyuusaku's hands before backing away. His hand—warm and dry and *human*—pressed down on the top of Kyuusaku's stiff head. "Watch over the company and listen to your *mother*. He cries plenty when overwhelmed. I'd really hate to have to restart this family game with a new child. Understood?"

Turning their rigid neck, Kyuusaku watched as Zeku swiftly climbed towards the exit. Even as their head was still drawing a blank and their shoulders still trembling, Kyuusaku inhaled sharply, tasting the tingling of cold recycled air filtered through the air conditioner on their numbed tongue. Quietly, they answered, "Yes, Dad."

Chapter End Notes

So I haven't had the time to reply to the comments but please be assured that I really appreciate them and read them!

On a side note, LOL, this series of fic really is just me giving all the characters trauma.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1

“This is Yokohama?”

Dark mist swirled around Shigaraki Tomura’s feet, morphing together with the shadows as if calling the darkness to life. He emerged from the portal fully, stepping into the alley while studying his new surroundings with a scrutinizing gaze.

What he noticed first was the smell of kitchen oil, thick enough to coat his lungs with the taste of spiced roasted duck. Furrowing his brows as he adjusted to the smog, a whiff of fried chicken came through the exhaust vent on the side of the building. Sandwiched between two buildings, the narrow space he currently stood was dimly lit and a thin but visible layer of dust covered an empty beer bottle on the ground.

As expected, there were bound to be corners in every city that were neglected, where most of the population avoided the desolate areas.

While Yokohama wasn’t fully barricaded and cut off from the rest of Japan, Shigaraki thought it would be a waste of time to deal with the soldiers patrolling the highway. They had found quite a few different layers of fences and barbed-wired gates around the border of Yokohama. Not all of them were military of course. Some belonged to small farms and others were remnants marking the location of old mining worksites or other industrial grounds. In hindsight, it was even a bit laughable. A bit of latticed metal or nailed down wood wasn’t going to stop people with powerful quirks, or even a regular but determined nobody with a standard shovel.

Which made Shigaraki suspicious.

It has been a long standing knowledge in the underground world that villains never made it in Yokohama alone. No matter how powerful their quirks were or how notorious their bounties were, not a single villain ever returned from Yokohama alive. There had been stories, of course. Older tales about how a scout’s finger was returned to their boss back in the age where yakuza actually posed a formidable threat. But those were history. The criminals on the outside simply stopped talking about Yokohama, as if the secret would burn their tongues if uttered too loud. *Not worth it*, they spat. Gangsters and ability users, Port Mafia and the other locals had already wrecked Yokohama to a lawless junkyard. Most criminals wanted to cruise through life, to be free and wild and do what they pleased. What luxuries or quality could they secure from a city already in ruins? And there had always been rumours about the monsters that resided there. Outlaws and remnants of “*things*” from past wars. The details were much too vague though, ridiculous enough that they might as well have claimed Emperor Sutoku was personally haunting Yokohama. At least that sounded more believable.

But when news of UA sending their students on a Yokohama field trip began circulating through, that resparked people's interest. Couldn't be helped, Shigarki supposed. UA had to answer to boards and governors, which for any organizations that got that large, information was bound to leak from somewhere. Still, it piqued people's interest. UA obviously knew something the common swindlers didn't for them to send *first year students* to a city famous for violence and lawlessness. Maybe the situation in Yokohama wasn't actually all that dire. Maybe this was UA's way of showcasing how they offered such great training that even teenagers could square off with the feared ability users said to wield godly powers.

And Shigaraki simply had to see what UA was up to.

He had ordered Kurogiri to bring them to a quieter part of Yokohama so they wouldn't immediately draw attention. It was still bright enough in the day that Shigaraki could see the crowds on the main street easily. The infamous city laid bare before him, where the familiar fumes and noises of a modern city greeted him.

"I thought this place was ruled by vicious criminals."

Shigaraki thought aloud as his lips pulled into a tight frown. Ahead of the alley, there were people on the main street. Normal people. Office workers with briefcases, housewives pushing strollers, young kids following their grandparents...they appeared just as unsuspecting and meandered about foolishly all the same as the civilians on the outside.

The only jarring aspect was how there was hardly anyone with physical mutations walking about.

"Why does everything look so normal?" Dabi seconded, voicing out everyone's confusion.

The atmosphere was much too light here. Shigaraki had expected some sort of civilization to exist but he couldn't sense any chaos from destruction or despair in the air. There was no evidence of gang wars or authoritarian rules from how organized crime had a stronghold here.

It might even be fitting to say this place looked...peaceful?

"This is indeed Yokohama," Kurogiri confirmed after checking their GPS location. "We should find a temporary hideout first, going out without a plan will cause us to catch unwanted attention."

He was right. With so few people with quirks around, some of them would stick out like a sore thumb. About half an hour later, they arrived at an abandoned factory. It was a beat up place with a thick layer of dust covering the floor but it would have to do for now. They didn't plan on staying in Yokohama for too long either.

Shigaraki stared at the group he had brought with him. All Might was but one man with a foot in the coffin. With the League's previous invasion of USJ and after the Hero Killer incident, the villains who had been in hiding became bolder. Many sought out Shigaraki, believing that there was some connection between him and the Hero Killer–Stain. The world

had not forgotten Stain after Hosu as Shigaraki had planned. In fact, the League was the one living on borrowed fame, where fanatics gathered because of Stain's influence.

They looked to Shigaraki for leadership but they weren't looking *at* him. What they wanted to see was Shigaraki draped in Stain's ideals, playing some sort of twisted anti-hero nonsense and frothing at the mouth about a new order. It irked Shigaraki greatly to be overshadowed by Stain.

Conviction and resolve. Determination and a goal. Well, they were about destruction all the same, weren't they? There was no difference between Stain and him. Shigaraki got his answer from that Midoriya kid. Chance had led Shigaraki to Midoriya in the shopping mall and while their talk didn't last long, Shigaraki knew where his trouble lay.

All Might.

It had always been All Might. The No.1 hero with his brilliant halo of hope was the source of Shigaraki's troubles. Many things had happened and plenty of which didn't turn out as Shigaraki had wanted but he shouldn't let any of this set him back. His goal was simple: Kill All Might. Destroy society's order and rip away the fake sense of peace that they had cuddled themselves with.

"So what's the plan?" Mr. Compress laid out a map that he got from a convenience store on the metal crate. He had taken off his mask and hat so he could blend in better.

"We barely know anything about Yokohama," Magne said.

"You really don't have any more intel about Yokohama?" Spinner turned to Kurogiri and the man made of mist shook his head.

"I have told you everything the information broker could gather already. The ability users here don't like fighting with an audience or leaving witnesses."

It was shocking how little knowledge the outside world had about Yokohama. Even back during All For One's prime, he had stayed out of Yokohama. To be honest, the greatest villain since the rise of quirks had been hesitant about allowing Shigaraki to enter Yokohama. However, after some debate with his disciple, he had relented. Shigaraki wanted to see what a world free of heroes looked like, a place where criminals were free to reign and AFO couldn't disagree that this was a perfect learning opportunity.

And an even better one to coordinate an attack on UA. The heroes were also cut off from their usual resources in Yokohama. UA hadn't disclosed that their students were headed to Yokohama publicly. If Shigaraki's group managed to do something to the students inside Yokohama, it'd be another heavy blow to the population's trust in their shiny heroes. Better yet, if Shigaraki could establish the League's presence in Yokohama, it'd boost their fame to the other criminals and the heroes would be too scared to even set foot inside to catch them.

As All For One's disciple, Shigaraki wanted to make his sensei proud, to accomplish what his predecessor couldn't.

“Hey Shigaraki,” Spinner said as he looked out the crack in the wall. “There are people outside.”

He could see the faint outlines of a few people dressed in black across the street. Most of them barely made an effort to hide themselves, as if they didn’t care if they got caught.

Port Mafia.

That was fast. Shigaraki didn’t think any of those watching them was high in Port Mafia’s ranks though. There were slight bulges under their suits that suggested firearms or other weapons but other than that, they were just as plain looking as the civilians Shigaraki had seen so far. No mutations to suggest any quirks.

“Should I cut them?” Toga pulled out her knife, muttering in a whimsical tone about if Yokohama people’s blood would look different from those on the outside.

“Ignore them,” Shigaraki instructed with a sour taste in his mouth but he brushed off his displeasure. “Unless they attack us first, we leave them alone and don’t provoke them unnecessarily. What we need right now is information.”

“Sure thing!” Twice nodded in agreement but then his attitude quickly changed. “No way! I say we take them out and show them who’s boss!”

His companions ignored the odd personality split.

Like the formation of any new groups of people, this League needed time to get accustomed to each other. Even in the video games, new additions of comrades or even a new weapon required a few practice rounds. Not to mention they were unlocking a completely new map.

Shigaraki could have sent his new subordinates to scout alone but he needed to show leadership and confidence. It wouldn’t do if it looked like he was afraid of Yokohama and was just sending people to die. Sure, it would have been better if UA had a training camp elsewhere but he could still work with this.

The majority of the police here were quirkless, posing minimal threat if any at all. However, the government had special divisions to deal with ability users and people with quirks. If things got out of hand, the military would be deployed too. Random cannon fodder wouldn’t be able to collect and extract good enough information from Yokohama.

“Those who oppose the Port Mafia will be crushed by vicious gravity.”

All eyes turned to Shigaraki.

“There’s someone who can control gravity within the mafia’s ranks. No one had ever made it to the top of Port Mafia’s towers. Not a troop of armed soldiers, not the latest models of any helicopters or tanks, not any trained assassins either.” That was what All For One told him. There were rumours about how the current Port Mafia boss killed the previous but other than that, no one else had done the impossible.

“The Boss?” Magne suggested.

Shigaraki shook his head.

For an organization that supposedly was in control, there was very little actual information that was of use about them. Mills of gossip and rumours circulated through the streets, where tales about what Port Mafia *could* do or the heinous crimes they had committed were shared through hushed whispers. Except, there was never anything concrete. Unlike the villains trying to make a name for themselves on the outside, Port Mafia had wiped their tracks clean, leaving speculations to claim or point fingers at their handiwork. Everyone somehow was expected to know they did it and plenty more just couldn't or didn't want to come forward to prove it.

It seemed rather silly. What was the point of displaying power if they still had to hide in the shadows? Why would they still adhere to societal norms when they had the strength to make this world suit them instead? Perhaps they were scared and all the rumours were purposeful deterrents to scare the outsiders away without a fight. It was actually kind of difficult to imagine how a bunch of quirkless sheeps would ever be able to stand up to the group Shigaraki had collected. Each of the new League members were intimidatingly deadly in their own ways, either possessing special skills or years of experiences in battle and crimes. Not to mention, Shigaraki had left a few other candidates back outside of Yokohama, members that they could summon upon command with Kurogiri's portals.

One card they had that the heroes don't.

But Shigaraki had underestimated the UA kids at USJ. He wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

"We need to tread carefully. I want to know what these supposed *ability users* are capable of first. And we need to find out who the important players are. I don't want surprises."

Pacing around the room, Shigaraki tapped a finger on the edge of the crate as his eyes landed back on the map of Yokohama. He sent Mr. Compress and Magne to scout. Spinner or Twice would catch too much unnecessary attention so they stayed behind to make this factory a little more bearable as a temporary base of operations. It was better to keep Kurogiri close in case they needed to change hideouts too. As for Dabi and Toga...

"Go find out what UA has been up to. I doubt Yokohama is just letting teenagers with their hero complex and quirks run wild in a city that's 90% quirkless. But don't engage with them yet, we don't want to give away the element of surprise."

They had much work to do.

The city wasn't as peaceful as it appeared. There were countless smaller organizations living in the shadows, vying for opportunities like sharks that could sense a whiff of blood from miles away. But even within Yokohama itself, the general populace appeared oblivious of what the underground society was capable of. More stories. More rumours. There were stories about assassins with ferrokinesis, war legends about skilled swordsmen, and a bunch

of other things that sounded more like fairytales or urban legends of things that go *Boo!* in the night.

One of such ridiculous tales was about the man who controlled Suribachi City. Barely of age but he was in command of a monstrous dragon like the one from ancient mythologies. The citizens feared yet commended him, comparing him as an equal rival to the other powerhouses in Yokohama.

Shigaraki was perplexed by the idea. It was one kid. So long as he was still mortal, he would never be invincible. Celestial or man made...none of that mattered. What intrigued Shigaraki more was that apparently Huang Zeku was antagonizing the UA students. He had kidnapped Bakugou Katsuki and if the UA kids wanted their classmate back, they had to find a missing Dragon Pearl.

Shigaraki had planned and imagined so many possible scenarios but this was simply absurd. And what was even more insane was that the hero kids were actually turning over every rock trying to find the mythical pearl.

There was no way Shigaraki lost to this bunch of idiots before!

Could the hero students seriously not tell they were being played like a harpoon? Not even a fiddle cause at least fiddles required some instrumental skills. The “scheme” was such a brute force slap to the face that Shigaraki felt like he was staring at a really bad take of modern D&D.

Dragons did not exist. Neither did magical pearls.

The UA kids were being distracted on purpose. For what though? And why Bakugou specifically? Did the Yokohama locals see the same thing as Shigaraki from the Sports Festival? Villains weren't the only ones who were oppressed by this twisted society. Bakugou had a talent for heroism but he also didn't fit their mold. Rough around the edges, he might be channeling his desires into performing heroism for now but who said that couldn't be changed?

Someone—like Shigaraki or another criminal—just needed to give Bakugou a reason to. Also, this turn of events in Yokohama made Shigaraki wonder if he could capitalize on the chance. UA was too busy to even notice the League. The rest of Yokohama might be so out of touch with the outside hero and villains stuff that no one showed signs of recognizing the League either. Granted, most of their members weren't previously captured in the news but even Shigaraki could walk freely without hiding his face and still none recognized him.

Well, wasn't that just infuriating?

It meant that people didn't fear the League enough, that their name hadn't reached the ears of the stupid crowd. From this point, Shigaraki supposed he could even say the Yokohama civilians were even more shielded and sheltered than those fools on the outside.

Hence why he arrived in Suribachi City with Toga, Magne, and Mr. Compress.

The night had fallen, draping a dark veil over the sky. Dazzling neon signs came to life along with the soft glows of lanterns, illuminating the street. The nightlife of Yokohama was busier than expected. Awkwardly, the itch of Shigaraki's skin spread down the side of his neck as he maneuvered through the crowd.

People.

So many people.

The crowd was bustling with festive energy for no particular reason other than looking for a good time. They laughed and drank on the side of the road. Parents brought their child to the food trucks and the clicking clatter of coins exchanged hands. It was hard to imagine less than a dozen years ago, this place was nothing but a run down slum.

Huang Zeku built this.

This was a teenager who lived at the top of the food chain for most of his life. A prideful boy with power and brains, someone who obtained wealth and influence with his own hands.

Shigaraki wondered what kind of expression Huang would make when his precious city was at stake. With such bustling streets, it would be a matter of minutes before Shigaraki could turn this paradise into hell on earth. The League could cause as much destruction and chaos as possible, kill whoever tried to stop them, and then take control once they had beaten everyone into submission.

A bell, crisp but jarringly loud as if dangled right next to his ear shook him out of his thoughts.

"Hey Shigaraki, isn't that cute?" Toga squealed softly as she pointed to another girl walking ahead. Dressed in an elaborately brocaded robe, red tassels and multiple layers of jewelry decorated her from head to toe. She spun as she walked, letting the tendrils of colorful sheer chiffon swirled in the air. Bronze bells were strapped to her belt and that was the noise Shigaraki heard. The girl also had a matching bronze demon-faced mask that appeared hefty.

"I want that!"

Mr. Compress pressed a hand over Toga's mouth so her excitement didn't catch attention. He worried over nothing though because the crowd was moving along around them, all gathering towards the same direction. Shigaraki followed the flow of people to a large clearing, where men with bare chests were gathered around a campfire. From their plain appearances, it was obvious they didn't have any quirks. They stuck some kind of sticks into the fire and pulled them out, running into the clearing and bang!

Metal liquid exploded in the air, spreading as a burst of sparkling rain that was more mesmerizing than fireworks. Trails of fire drizzled to the ground while the crowd cheered. With a smile, the performer hit the sticks together again, sending bursts and bursts of burning liquid iron into the air. Clouds of fire imploded across the sky, blooming in the night.

"Pretty cool, huh? It's called Datie Hua," a young voice said behind Shigaraki.

When he turned, there was a boy standing behind the counter of a curry food truck. The boy had a pair of goggles and short dark hair, as well as a stupidly friendly smile.

Fixing his collar, Mr. Compress approached the boy and began making small talk. After Mr. Compress bought a box of curry, the boy's smile grew wider.

"If you go down that way, you'll find something even more interesting than the performances here," he told Mr. Compress. "Just try to keep your voices down, you don't want to disturb what you shouldn't."

Mr. Compress returned, offering the curry to Toga and Magne. "So, that was very obviously an invitation. What should we do?"

They were being watched. Honestly, Shigaraki expected more from Yokohama, whether it was from Port Mafia or Huang Zeku. Port Mafia had watched them from afar but did nothing else. No warning and no olive branches, almost as if they considered Shigaraki's group lab rats to be observed beyond glass panels. Huang Zeku was even more pathetic. Using little tricks of child messengers as if he didn't think Shigaraki had what it took to kill one. Or maybe the supposed Dragon of Suribachi City was so useless that he had to hide behind kids.

Shigaraki should wreck havoc upon this clearing but that wouldn't accomplish much, would it? His previous plan to destroy a city made a martyr out of Stain. What good would killing a bunch of nobodies—not even a hero to witness his power—do when his real target wasn't around?

Without saying a word, Shigaraki walked towards the direction the boy had pointed to. Away from the main street, the road ahead grew quieter and darker. The ground was no longer illuminated by street lamps the further they ventured into Suribachi City. Red lanterns casted an eerie hue of crimson over the wooden doors and cobblestone road.

In the dead quiet, footsteps sounded just as Shigaraki pivoted around the corner. His hands shot out, ready to decay whatever was approaching but then he pulled himself back during the last second.

"Dabi?"

The man with his burnt patches of skin and tattered long coat met Shigaraki's eyes, looking equally surprised.

"What happened?" Magne squeezed between them, reaching carefully to test if this was indeed the real Dabi. Dabi slapped her hand away though. Yep, definitely the same rude fuck.

"There's a woman in a demon mask, I was chasing her." Dabi scowled, looking a little annoyed. "She was kind of nutty in the religious way and was pissing me off."

There was certainly more to that story. Dabi might love his arsons but he wasn't so brainless that he would give himself away while they still haven't formulated a proper plan. Shigaraki didn't have the chance to press Dabi though, since a portal opened besides them.

Out of the black mist, Twice appeared while dragging Spinner over his shoulders. “Oi, Shigaraki! Something’s wrong with Spinner! He’s feeling awesome!”

Spinner groaned with a hand clenching his stomach.

Poison. Shigaraki concluded once he checked Spinner’s face. His lips had a blue tint and cold sweat dripped down his forehead. How? Spinner hadn’t left their hideout and he ate and drank the exact same things that the rest of the League did. He had the morphology of a lizard too with his hardened skin. It wouldn’t have been easy to slip him something foul and him alone.

“Should we retreat?” suggested Kurogiri.

“No, it’d be too late for that.” By the time they get to the Doctor and have him figure out what poison Spinner was dealing with...Spinner’s system won’t last that long. Shigaraki scratched his neck harder, feeling how his fingernails dug into the side of his flesh. This wasn’t a coincidence. They had been herded here without them realizing and they were very obviously being mocked. Like mice locked in a maze, running around on a wheel of traps.

Shigaraki’s blood boiled as if there was lava beneath his veins. However, he pursed his lips and stormed ahead, gesturing for the rest to follow. They didn’t have to go far and for a brief moment, Shigaraki’s group was speechless. The road had ended in front of them, where a small canal split the land and the rippling waters reflected the moon’s silver glow atop the crests of small waves lapping at the edge of grey boulders.

Across the canal, the figure illuminated by the gentle moonlight was a teenager with skin as pale as an apparition. He might as well be one too, or be a visionary trick of the night superimposing the past to the present. Sat upon the stone stairs leading down to the canal, his feet hovered above the waters. His outfit was black as ink and held the soft glossy luster of satin. Embroidered upon which was a delicate pattern featuring gold ginkgo leaves. Long, red hair draped down his shoulders, flowing over the exposed porcelain skin of his toned chest like a trail of blood. The teen had a pair of earrings, where large droplet-shaped pieces of jade dangled from intricate gold. They glowed with a soft hue, dim as an ember.

And the only impression Shigaraki was left with was how *wrong* and contradicting everything felt. It was as if he was staring at a finished puzzle with one wrong piece that had just the right fit with a similar enough colour but still wrong.

The feeling of “wrong” only intensified the longer Shigaraki stared. The teen’s posture was relaxed and unbothered, perhaps a little bored even. Although dressed in traditional clothing, he wasn’t wearing the outfit properly as if he would rather step all over the traditions and rules. There was also a carelessness to how he treated the luxuries that would cost a fortune despite being decked in expensive jewelry. And Shigaraki would admit, he had a beautiful face...if only the coldness of his half-lidded eyes didn’t distract others with its sharpness first.

“Huang Zeku.” The name rolled off Shigaraki’s tongue without needing an introduction.

Hearing his name, Huang Zeku shifted his weight but didn't address or even look at Shigaraki. He reached for the plate of lotus shaped pastries in an expensive-looking wooden box beside him and drank from a ceramic jar. A whiff of the sweetness of osmanthus wine was carried across the canal.

"I heard that Port Mafia has five fancy towers downtown. I had imagined someone like you would at least have a decent office in that big company of yours."

Shigaraki's sarcastic remark was a punch on cotton. Huang Zeku barely lifted his eyes as he swirled the ceramic jar slowly.

"That is just a building. The heart of Suribachi City is wherever I am." His voice was calm but cold like a drop of morning dew dripped into Shigaraki's brain. Although not harsh on the ears, still a rather unpleasant feeling.

If anything, the League was considered a rising black horse in this generation of criminals. God knew what terrors Shigaraki could unleash if he released Nomus in Yokohama. Yet, Huang Zeku appeared to have no interest in them, not even a tiny bit of tension in preparation of getting attacked.

And the feeling of wrong intensified into a silent voice begging for Shigaraki to flee.

Flee. Him?

When he had the numbers and strength and all Huang Zeku showcased so far was dirty tricks? No. Shigaraki absolutely refused to be scared away so easily. They were the League of Villains. They were different from the regular criminals.

He would never be a disgrace to All For One.

"What did you do to Spinner?" Toga demanded after noticing that Twice swayed slightly from Spinner's weight. Spinner's condition was worsening, where he could no longer support himself upright even with Twice helping. "Where's the antidote?"

"This is a rather rude way of inviting us, young man," Mr. Compress quipped too. "Did you think a bit of ghost stories and magic tricks were going to scare us off?"

Huang Zeku provided no answer or response. He erected an incense from the wooden plate by sticking it into the half finished dessert. A pale finger tapped the end of the incense lightly and within a blink of an eye, the tip of the incense was lit ablaze. Thin wisps of smoke climbed upward, wavering in the night air. Practiced and elegant, there was an old timely noble grace about him that told of a posh upbringing.

"He has until this incense is gone," Huang Zeku said and he finally looked at Shigaraki's direction. His eyes were red but its colours felt darker than Shigaraki's, darker and colder like dried blood frozen for too long. "Are you their leader or their friend? Why do they speak without being spoken to?"

Dabi wanted to bark an insult back but Shigaraki raised his hand, stopping him.

“What do you want to talk about?” asked Shigaraki. Anger had simmered deeper closer to his bones but his head was calm. It was more than obvious that Huang Zeku was looking down at them but Shigaraki wasn’t shaken enough to really be affected by it.

“What is the purpose of your little group?”

Another one of those. Shigaraki had answered this question one too many times.

“To destroy All Might.”

“Why bother? Someone else will pick up the mantle and continue on.”

Huang Zeku drank from the wine jar again. The way he moved was still lethargic but it had a rugged boldness to it that told of power and confidence, a striking contrast against his more delicate features. Wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, he sat up a little straighter and pointed to Shigaraki.

“If I were you, after the stunt at USJ, I’d start spreading rumors to slander the current pro heroes. It wouldn’t take much, they create their own scandals of love and bribery more than enough to circle around.” Still sounding bored, his voice was soft as a serpent’s hiss but there was a glint of...*something* more behind his eyes. “Snip the future at its bud, destroy the past, and burn the present. That is how you manipulate fear.”

Shigaraki cracked a smile. “Who’s the actual villain here?”

“What good is a villain?” Huang Zeku leaned back and a scoff escaped his parted lips. There wasn’t so much of a sneer on his face but as fast as the flash of interest had appeared, he seemed to have lost it just as instantly too. “A coin overspent so loosely holds no value. A snot-nosed kid dropping worms over their classmate’s head is a villain. One with the wrong quirk? A villain. Piracy. Theft. Murder. Why should I be lumped together with such trash?”

“D-don’t make fun of us...” Spinner coughed from the ground. His hair fell in front of his eyes as he attempted to keep the upper half of his body straight. Shakingly, he glared at Huang Zeku. “W-wwe will carry on Stain’s legacy and let the world see its wrong! We’re not the same as the nameless grunts. You’d be trembling in fear if you knew how many people we have killed!”

“Ah, the mutts have killed people. Is that supposed to make you—” the pause was longer than it was comfortable, not out of disbelief or shock but because of boredom—“special?”

It felt as if there was nothing the League could do that Huang Zeku hadn’t already expected or planned for, that their every move wasn’t actually out of their own wills but his instead. How Shigaraki wanted to wrap his hands around Huang Zeku’s neck, to watch true terror wipe that indifferent look off the teen’s face as Shigaraki made him watch his own limbs disintegrate slowly piece by piece.

Spinner wanted to say something else but he coughed and saliva foamed at his mouth. No blood yet but maybe that wasn’t necessary for death.

“Why are you in Yokohama?” asked Huang Zeku. The incense beside him was burning low. “Are you just chasing after UA like mongrels attracted to feces? What plans do you have other than empty talks about how you will bring society to its knees?”

“We can show you what we can do,” Dabi growled as his flames shot across the water. Only, the waves unexpectedly soared high and his fire crashed into a wall of water. Sizzling, heated vapours turned into a spray of hot mist that brushed beads of water into Shigaraki’s hair.

“Such impatience.” Huang Zeku leaned his head on his hand. With a tilt of his hand, wine poured over the incense, putting it out completely. “How little control you have over your own man too.”

Shigaraki’s expression darkened. “Hand over the antidote.”

“Don’t waste time talking to him, Shigaraki.” Stepping forward, Magne unwrapped her weapon in a fury. “We didn’t gather to take commands like good little soldiers. A friend once told me that those who are bound by the shackles of normalcy would mock those without restraints.” Her quirk activated, surrounding Huang Zeku with its glow. “We are here because we want to be free!”

They expected Magne’s quirk to bring Huang Zeku across the waters, yanking him out of his relaxed posture but the teen only sighed and returned to drinking even as his body levitated into the air. A shadow rushed up from underneath the canal and a long snout broke free to the surface. In a span of a stolen breath, the monster emerged fully from the waters, casting its giant shadow over the League members. Sharp teeth took a chomp out of Magne’s weapon, nearly taking her arm with its bite.

Magne gasped and stumbled backwards, nearly crashing into a fall. Water splashed down upon them all, drenching them with a coldness so steeply sharp that it felt like icicles stabbing into their joints. Before Shigaraki could react, he heard a sound that rattled his brain inside his skull. It was a low roar that grasped his heart and dug in violently, ready to rip the organ out. Fear shot down his spine and every single nerve in his body felt like it was going to be yanked free from his bones. If his will had been any weaker he might have even soiled himself.

He heard the sound of knees hitting the ground. Straining his neck under the immense pressure, he saw that Magne and Mr. Compress were on the ground with cold sweat tainting their backs. Dabi didn’t look any better. His eyes narrowed as he kept himself on his feet, albeit with quivering knees. Blue flames erupted from the scarred young man’s fingertips and the fire blasted across the canal again, stronger this time too. It seared the ground, leaving black stripes. There was nowhere for Huang Zeku to hide and whatever had emerged from the waters was too big of a target. Shigaraki was sure the flames hit.

But when the dust settled, Shigaraki was met with the guttural snarl of a beast beyond man’s imagination. It was such a hideous creature. Covered in hard scales and spiky protrusions, it had rows of sharp teeth and three bulging eyes that appeared fixated upon them hungrily. Claws that looked like they could slice through steel tapped at the waters impatiently.

The dragon lifted a claw and flicked at Kurogiri. It happened so fast that all Shigaraki registered was the loud crash of Kurogiri slamming right into a brick wall. It shouldn't have happened. Kurogiri was a man made of mist! But not even him had enough time to react. This was not how it was supposed to turn out.

Dragons didn't exist.

But he was staring at one now.

An ability, was this what it meant? They said that abilities could surpass the limitations of a mortal body and defy all laws of physics, that was what made them more powerful than quirks.

"S-Shiggy?" Toga whispered through clattering teeth. The knife in her hand seemed like a miniscule toy in front of the dragon. She suddenly bent over and vomited and her body convulsed hard enough that Mr. Compress had to put her in a marble for her own safety.

In the middle of the canal, Huang Zeku laid on a segment of the dragon's long and coiled body. Still with one hand propping his head up, he finished the jar of wine and a drop of the golden liquid dripped down the edge of his chin. Uncaring of how the front of his robe was scattered wide open or how water dripped down his hair, he laughed. The teen wasn't even serious yet, watching the events unfold as if it was merely a demonstration about how insignificant Huang Zeku thought the League was.

A single scale shot out of the dragon's body, shattering Twice's clone before it could even take shape.

"Incompetent does not begin to describe my disappointment." Huang Zeku tossed the jar back, letting it shatter on the bank. "But you can still work, I suppose. See, somebody stole Coiled Dragon's Dragon Pearl and I want it back. Who actually solves this mystery doesn't matter at all. The hero students are in quite the quandary over it though."

"What are you trying to say?" Shigaraki snarled while looking for an opening. One touch, he could decay this gigantic beast. He just needed one touch but he couldn't do it in the waters. Too uncertain and too dangerous.

With a flick of his hand, a pill bottle landed beside Shigaraki's feet. Inside the clear plastic were two pills and a piece of paper.

"Since you have nothing planned, I will tell you what to do: Return the Dragon Pearl to me before the hero kids and I'll give you Bakugou Katsuki." A smile appeared across Huang Zeku's lips, its curve wicked and sadistic. "Hurry along, this offer only lasts until tomorrow at midnight."

Shigaraki wanted to say something but pain exploded across his right cheek. The flesh had been ripped open, just wide enough that blood oozed down in a small stream but not enough to interfere with him talking or immediately put him out of commission. Biting down hard on his bottom lip, he refused to let any whimper of pain or noises of agony escape. He wouldn't

grant Huang Zeku that satisfaction. He met Huang Zeku's cold and empty gaze, trying to find any traces of lies or other motives but couldn't see anything.

"Leave," the Dragon of Suribachi City ordered. The hiss from the dragon told them that there was no room for arguments.

Thus, Shigaraki picked up the pill bottle and retreated without turning his back on Huang Zeku and his dragon. Glowering, Shigaraki stared at Huang Zeku with bloodshot eyes as if trying to etch the image of that cursed face into his brain. Black mist slowly covered the League member's bodies and wrapped around Shigaraki too.

Before the darkness fully embraced him, Shigaraki saw the dragon bring a long claw to its master, where soft lips had a taste of the villain's blood. A few drops of blood dripped onto the teen's earrings, soaking the jade before sliding down and vanishing into the red strands of hair. Licking his lips, there was a glossy red shine at the edge of Huang Zeku's mouth and Shigaraki knew that expression.

That monster was hungry for more.

"And cut!"

Dazai's voice came from above as Zeku climbed to the side of the street where a group of Huang Corp security guards gathered. Smiling, half of Dazai's body draped over the railing's ledge of the teahouse's wooden balcony. With a roll of paper in hand, he waved it around as if directing an invisible crew.

Zeku dried himself with the towel that his security guard provided. Another poured him a cup of hot tea from a water bottle, where the small steam escaping upwards carried a faint whiff of ginger spices.

"That was barely a passable performance!" Dazai chided, "where's the bloodthirsty pessimism? Where's the emo teenage angst and murderous psychosis? I wanted drama and spookiness! I needed haunting and melancholy!"

Coiled Dragon spat a mouthful of water at Dazai, only to be blocked by the umbrella that Dazai magically pulled out just in time to avoid getting drenched. The sliding doors behind Dazai opened, revealing the others who had been eavesdropping on Zeku's conversation with the League.

"Yokohama certainly is seeing lots of guests lately." Mori sighed with an almost somberly tearful voice but his expression remained nonchalant. "We just want to be left alone, why is that so hard for the outsiders to understand?"

Seated across, Fukuzawa said nothing. His eyes were closed and his arms crossed in front of his chest as if resting. Neither man had touched the tea on the table, letting it run cold. Only Elise was playing with the plate of rice crackers as she leaned her chin on one hand. The little

girl twirled her golden locks between her fingers while a box of crayons sat on the hem of her red dress decorated in lace.

They had booked the whole teahouse as a back up. If Zeku's performance couldn't fool the League, then they had to deal with the villains instantly. No one needed outside criminals running free around Yokohama, especially not one with a decaying quirk.

"I could have handled them all by myself," Chuuya mumbled under his breath. He was leaning against a wooden pillar at the edge of the room. "Oi, you crab-head! Why are we even doing so much extra work? And why are we all fucking on standby just for a few idiots? Akutagawa could have dealt with them with one hand tied behind his back."

"Well, I guess I can't expect a hat rack to have enough brains to figure it out by himself. Director Taneda didn't ask for any explanations when I asked him to go and stall the outside officials tonight." Dazai made a face but continued on before Chuuya could punch him. "Now that Lizard Boy has ensnared both the heroes and the League's attention, we can kill two birds with one stone. Right, Ango?"

The government official sighed in exasperation. "Don't make it seem like I plotted this. This is completely your idea." Coughing, he turned to Chuuya with a more serious tone. "It appears that the lesson is not getting through to the hero students. If anything, they are *more* determined to nose into Yokohama's business. Perhaps not now but in the future. Commendable but also we can't allow that. Thus, we need something that will shock their system so much that they won't ever even dare to think about it again."

"You want to make an example out of the League in front of them?" Chuuya raised an eyebrow.

"Exactly!" Dazai answered excitedly in a sing-song voice as he wrapped an arm around Ango's shoulder. "We can't kill the students but we're in every right to deal with wanted criminals! Especially if said criminals are causing chaos first. Bonus points if we're under the guise of protecting the students from their own issues. The outside guys should have done a better job at capturing their own criminals."

Ango pushed Dazai away. He pulled out a photo of Dabi taken from afar.

"This man with the burnt scars is Todoroki Touya, first son of the current No.2 hero—Endeavor. He was reportedly dead from a mountain fire around ten years ago. Our agents are still trying to figure out how he got involved with the League." Ango grabbed Dazai by the back of his collar and very sternly, he met Fukuzawa and Mori's eyes. "It's preferred if we can capture him alive. He might be useful for bargaining with the heroes later."

Fukuzawa nodded. "And what of Shigaraki Tomura?"

"All For One has been alive for so long that it's hard to believe someone like that would put all his eggs in one basket, especially when it relies on a supposed successor." Mori hummed. His smile was unchanged as he said, "Who knows what surprises All For One had put in that boy? I for one am not interested in undoing another's questionable handiwork in such an unstable state. Killing him is the safest option."

A light crease appeared between Fukuzawa's brows but he didn't object.

"Heard that, Huang?" Dazai twirled back to the balcony, leaning against the railing dangerously with his head thrown back. "Go crazy on the murder! We got Yosano on standby and we'll lend you Tanizaki. Anything else you want to add?"

"Give them Bakugou Katsuki."

Dazai's smile disappeared as he turned around. Mori let out a small noise of intrigue while Anko frowned. Chuuya released an audible grunt of confusion while Fukuzawa stood up, walking towards the balcony and looked down at the teen. Coiled Dragon had long vanished, shrunken small and hidden under Zeku's robe, leaving the teen with just the security guards who gulped with difficulty.

"The plan is for Atsushi to pretend to have broken him out alone so when they get to the battle, they'd look like reinforcement for the students. Give them a little bit of hope," said Fukuzawa. They wanted to keep the outsiders out but not completely crush an entire generation of hopeful youths.

"And I say put him in the center from the start."

Threw the students off guard. Who would care about a stupid pearl when their friend was right in front of them? Who would care about the why or how Bakugou even got there in the heat of the moment? The villains would see it as an opportunity. Shigaraki was obviously not a doormat that would let people walk all over him. Zeku had just wiped the bottom of his shoes with Shigaraki's dignity. Present him with the chance to stick it to Zeku by taking both the pearl *and* Bakugou? He'd take that bait faster than they could spell Bakugou's name.

"That's harsh," whistled Dazai but his eyes remained calculating as he stared at Zeku with intense curiosity. "Why the change?"

Unbothered by the scrutinizing gaze, Zeku yawned. "He's too noisy. Kyuusaku has been complaining nonstop."

"Didn't think you are the type to spoil your kid so much."

"Would you rather I feed Bakugou's tongue to Coiled Dragon?" Zeku snapped back. "If so, send Yosano to my office in the morning. We'll see how many tongues I have to rip out for the hero to learn how to shut up properly."

Faking a shudder, Dazai ducked behind Fukuzawa, who was tapping the hilt of his sword as a warning.

"The heroes have to leave Yokohama alive," reminded Fukuzawa in a stern tone. His glare shifted between Mori and Zeku. "No unnecessary deaths or torture. That was our agreement."

"Why, I always uphold my end of the bargain. Although...I am curious about what is so special about Shigaraki Tomura. So if anything, please try to leave his corpse intact enough for an autopsy." Mori placed a hand on his chest as if that would show how sincere he was as

he stood up. Chuuya hurried over and presented the man with his coat, which Mori slipped into gracefully. "Come, dear Elise."

"Rintarou, let's get cake on the way home." The little girl grabbed Mori's hand.

"This late?"

"I don't care," she pouted. "I want cake and I want it nnnnnnooow!"

"Oh Darling, oh my sweetest, don't crinkle your pretty face." Mori hauled the girl up into his arms, cooing and gushing at Elise in a gentle voice. "Let's see what stores are still open then, shall we? Chuuya! Hurry now! Get the car!"

Fixing his hat, Chuuya followed. "Yes, Boss."

With a shook of his head, Ango took his leave too. Dazai raised a middle finger behind Chuuya's back before turning his head back towards the street. However, Zeku and the Huang Corp employees were long gone too. Fukuzawa's hand landed on Dazai's shoulder in a heavy pat.

"Let's go, we have a long day ahead of us tomorrow." The man rubbed his temple as if dealing with a giant headache.

Dazai shrugged as he pushed off the railing and walked alongside Fukuzawa. "On the bright side, tomorrow is the last day of UA's field trip! Just a few more hours until we're free!"

And this joke of a theater could finally conclude.

Chapter End Notes

Am I making sense? I think I'm making sense.

Anyhow, we're almost to the stage where I can reveal what the dragon pearl is!

If you notice me locking and unlocking my fics, that's cause of the bot and scam comments. Seems like they are targeting the recently updated fics and I want them to stop...

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!